# A search for meaning during financial crisis: An interpretative phenomenological study of highly educated and unemployed Greek young professionals

**Dionysios Sourelis (M00278572)**

# ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study was to understand what meaning young Greek professionals make of the Greek socio-financial crisis. In addition, it explored the impact of the crisis in their daily life and how and if the crisis affected their attitudes and values in life. Eight volunteers, highly educated and unemployed young Greek people were interviewed about their experiences and meaning making processes while living in Greece during the ten-year (2009-2019) economic crisis. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to extract seven key themes: meaning making in the financial crisis, negative impacts of unemployment, positive impacts of unemployment, attitudes in the financial crisis, values in the financial crisis, dominant emotions, social observations and culture. The findings show that the educated and unemployed young professionals who live in Greece choose additional studies to create meaning and opportunities, while they spend more time with significant others; they love the natural environment of the country and use art and psychotherapy for their meaning making processes. Additionally, they keep their values unaffected, have an overall optimistic attitude for overcoming the crisis by accepting the harsh situation, while they critically reflect on the positive and negative impacts of their unemployment. Moreover, the study aimed to help counselling psychologists have a better understanding of existential psychology concepts such as the search for meaning and in particular the way it can affect the lives of young unemployed professionals who live in crisis, hoping for a contribution to their practice.

Key Words: Existential psychology, meaning, unemployment, financial crisis, impacts, values, attitudes.

In loving memory of my grandparents Eleni Lembessi (1934-2017) and Konstantinos Lembessis (1929-2020). May God rest your souls in peace grandma and grandpa.

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# Chapter 1

# Introduction

## 1.1 An introductory overview

The case of the Greek economic debt crisis is not simple. The underlying social, political and economic factors are complex, and for several years after the crisis started, it still constituted most of the on-going research for scientists in different fields from different countries (Tsafos, 2013). While economists or political scientists study mainly the high public debt in other Eurozone countries and political mismanagement, comparing the phenomena to older cases, theoretical and humanistic scientists like sociologists and psychologists search for the deeper reasons, social consequences and psychological impact of this crisis and compare it to similar ones from other countries and/or decades.

Since the financial crisis hit, young Greeks' lives, have been put on hold. The mass media refer to the Greek debt crisis as the "Greek Depression" because of the multivariate consequences in citizens lives. According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (2016) youth unemployment stands at a record high (more than 55%) and is the highest in the EU with almost half of under 30s still living with their parents. Before the crisis, young people used to work in precarious positions (Tsafos, 2013). Now precariousness is a reality for people even in their 40s, 50s or 60s. The mental health consequences of unemployment and austerity are several. Unemployment is commonly perceived as an economic problem, and most inquiries tend to come from the perspectives of finance and politics (Tsafos, 2013). However, unemployment often exacts a toll that goes beyond economic concerns to psychological ones.

According to Rachiotis, Stuckler, McKee and Hadjichristodoulou (2015), since 2009, there is a clear increase in suicides among persons of working age (20-59 years old), coinciding with austerity measures. The mean suicide rate rose by 35% between 2010 and 2012 from 3.37 to 4.56/100,000 population. The study was based on the last official data available. In all age groups suicides are higher among men than women. According to the same research, there was a significant association of male unemployment rates and suicide mortality among working age men between 15 and 64 years but not of female unemployment. It seems that there are other factors, along with limitations of the study, mediating the phenomenon of suicides, but the rise during the economic crisis is apparent. Additionally, there is a rise in general mortality during

this period, however it is not clear whether this is a result of austerity or other factors. Even though the suicide rate is a sensitive indicator of health impact, other possible health hazards should also be investigated. Additionally, the unofficial press reports of several media, assume that the rate has risen even more in the last five years.

According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (2016), during the period between 2011 and 2015, the population decreased from 11,123,392 to 10,846,979 which includes 451,423 Greeks who emigrated. According to the authority, emigration is the action by which a person, having previously been usually resident in a country, ceases to have their usual residence in that country for a period that is of at least 12 months. The mass media has claimed that the population has further decreased since 2015 but there are no official government statistics for this yet. However, it appears clear that a lot of Greek citizens have tried to start a new life in other countries that provide more opportunities and facilities, among them a number of Greek professionals, scientists and academics. This phenomenon is commonly referred to by the mass media as "Brain Drain". Brain drain refers to the phenomenon of graduates from less developed or poorer countries (like Greece) moving to more developed ones. In Greece, people who leave the country are not unskilled workers, but mostly newly qualified graduates (Theodoropoulos, Kyridis, Zagkos & Konstantinidou, 2015). It remains to be seen if this mass migration will alter the development and growth of the economy in the future.

According to the above-mentioned paper, Greek graduates work in 532 cities, mostly in London, followed by New York, Brussels, Boston, Paris, Geneva, Munich, Washington and Chicago. Additionally, there are 88,000 students who are studying in 45 different countries. Emigrants who are over 25 years old find jobs directly related to their areas of studies. The new generation of highly educated professionals have not lost faith in their country's educational system and for this reason they start their higher education in Greece. However, they struggle to find a job in their areas, therefore they emigrate as they feel that it is essential to work within their area of expertise even if this occurs outside of Greece. According to Theodoropoulos et al. (2015), even though the majority of participants in their study (45.75%) considered their emotional ties with Greece as a major inhibitor to leaving the country, the new generation still find the courage to resettle elsewhere for a better future. Statements like "Greece cannot guarantee my future" or "Greece cannot help its children" were agreed with by 61% and 66.5% respectively.

## 1.2 Research questions

Primary Research Question:

What meaning do young Greek professionals make of the Greek financial crisis?

Sub Questions:

1) What is the impact of financial crisis on young Greek professionals' daily life?
2) Does the financial crisis affect young Greek professionals' meanings, attitudes and values in life?

## 1.3 Aim of the project

The primary aim of this qualitative phenomenological research is to explore the individual experiences, meanings, values and attitudes of highly educated and currently unemployed Greek youth who are living through the current socio-economic crisis. Additionally, with this research, I aim and hope to add a useful contribution, to phenomenological research as well as counselling psychology and psychotherapy. After almost ten years since the start of the economic crisis, it seems that Greeks have started to re-arrange their priorities in life as a way to manage the new situation.

As a professional psychologist and existential psychotherapist, I observe that psychotherapy has started to play a crucial role in the life of young Greeks even if the public health system does not have the economic resources to serve the increased needs of citizens. Thus, I observe an increased interest of young people in many areas of psychological self-care (in forms like psychotherapy, coaching, psychoeducation, seminars, speeches, conferences, new bachelor or master programs etc.). Although I understand that there are many ways to approach the issue of the financial crisis, I chose to study it through the prism of existential philosophy and psychology, firstly because it is the field of my expertise as a counselling psychologist and secondly, I strongly believe that it successfully explains various phenomena of crisis. Existential psychology assumes the belief that life is harsh and challenging but worth living (Van Deurzen, 2009). My aim with this study is that counselling psychologists become familiar with the basic terminology, theories, and concepts of existential psychology hoping to contribute both to a better understanding of crisis phenomena and how people experience them, but also using those useful concepts that may help people to accept crises and manage them as a part of human existence and that may also help to create chances for a better fulfilling life.

## 1.4 Personal interest in the topic

As a Greek citizen myself, who practices psychotherapy professionally in Piraeus (a city near the capital of Athens) I can confirm that unemployment is one of the main causes that affects the mental health and psychological condition of most of my clients. This was one of the main reasons, that I became interested in conducting this research.

The well-educated unemployed Greek youth who still live in Greece seem to participate in various creative and introspective events, searching for hope, ways to socialize, or even to find an opportunity to offer help to other people. Even if Greece is in crisis, Greek citizens offer solidarity to immigrants from Syria or other Eastern countries who try to find a better place to live because of wars or other kinds of crises in their countries. Dozens of voluntary organisations have been enabled or even established and a high number of mostly young people seem to offer help to their fellow human beings (Simiti, 2017).

These observations from my daily professional, personal and family life, as well as my participation in many voluntary activities (both as a psychologist and academic), made me more interested in searching for the underlying life meanings in young Greeks who are, on the one hand either unemployed or in low paid jobs working in areas unrelated to their education, but on the other hand well-educated with a large percentage of them having attended higher education at master's or doctorate level.

Unfortunately, I also observe the rise of political or social extreme conservatism – fascism (as in the rest of Europe). The dissatisfaction and discomfort from the high rates of incoming immigration, seems to be one of the reasons for such phenomena in a society which is not satisfied with their state of well-being. These diversities made me scientifically curious and led to me planning and proposing this study. Therefore, I interviewed a small sample of well-educated young Greek professionals, asking them about their meaning in life in this period of crisis. It is very important to note that the term "young professionals" is used in my paper as a reference to young highly educated graduates (aged 25-35). The term is often used for this age group in Greek society and refers to the young generation which should be productive according to their professional knowledge. According to Hellenic Statistical Authority (2018) a high percentage (56.3%) of Greek young people between 25 and 34 years old live with their parents, or under parental care. Some work and/or study for higher degrees, others stay unemployed while studying or also having other obligations such as the obligatory military service for men.

As far as I am aware, this research is one of the first phenomenological studies, that gives the opportunity to highly educated Greek people to speak about their experiences, and

personal meanings and values during the period of crisis. Unfortunately, even if the Greek crisis has been ongoing for the last ten years, there is not enough research in the fields of psychology and sociology.

## 1.5 What resources do I bring to this study?

As a licensed psychologist and academic myself, who started to practice and teach during the period of economic crisis, I had (and still have) to cope with my own insecurities of both searching for collaborative work (such as university teaching) as well as setting up my own private practice. The experience of anxiety as a confrontation with givens such as my responsibility for my own life and freedom to choose under society's current limitations created a transformative sense of self as well as it changed many of my very personal meanings in life. I think that this resource gives me the courage not only to live in a country with a near bankrupted economy (but which is also the country where I want to live), but to conduct research in which my co-citizens share with me their very own meaning making/searching experience.

Another resource that I bring to this study is my experience in quantitative and qualitative research both as a postgraduate student and a supervisor. Having conducted two (graduate and postgraduate) qualitative research projects in areas of social psychology and forensic psychology (thematic and discourse analysis respectively), I felt confident to work as an associate instructor in mental and community health professional training programs at the University of the Aegean as well as lecturer in education and research supervisor at Metropolitan College, Greece.

## 1.6 The connection of this study to counselling psychology and existential psychotherapy

Meaning, attitudes, values and their exploration in crisis situations are key terms in this dissertation. So I think it would be useful to look at the connection between these terms and counselling psychology and psychotherapy in order to see the contribution of this dissertation to the scientific field of counselling psychology. But let's start in reverse, trying to explain briefly what psychology is and the field of counselling psychology. To begin with, psychology is an umbrella term that includes a variety of subspecialties, and while they may differ dramatically in philosophy and goals, converge on the fact that they are concerned with the study of the mind and behavior, including the study of thoughts, feelings and of experiences.

Psychologists often choose to specialize in a field of psychology (e.g. counselling or clinical psychology) and work in their field either as clinical practitioners and/or psychotherapists, or as researchers, or more broadly as academics, or combine the above fields, among others. Counselling psychology is a specialty that focuses on how people function both personally and in relationships at all ages. Counselling psychology addresses the emotional, social, work, school, or psychosomatic problems that people may have at different stages of their lives, focusing on typical life stresses or more serious issues that people struggle with, either individually or as members of. families, groups or organizations. Counselling psychologists help people with physical, emotional and mental problems improve their sense of well-being, relieve painful emotions such as anxiety, despair, sadness and grief, and resolve crises. Psychotherapy is the verbal form of therapy used by counselling psychologists to help people manage emotional or practical difficulties while there are ways and psychometric tools that help professionals provide assessment, evaluation or diagnosis (in more severe types of psychological phenomena). Psychotherapy is also distinguished in different approaches (e.g. cognitive behavioral, humanistic/existential, systemic, insight-oriented/psychodynamic), which are characterized by different philosophy and techniques, but aim to improve mental health and a sense of well-being through improvement, and change the dysfunctional way of thinking, problematic behaviors, the development of social skills, the acceptance of emotions, self-care, etc.

In this study I place more emphasis on counselling psychology and existential psychotherapy as it is the subject of my doctoral studies which inspired this study. Existential psychotherapy has its roots in the philosophical movement of existentialism which believes that people can find meaning when they create it. In addition, existential therapy is philosophically connected with phenomenology which as a trend is based on the investigation of phenomena through the senses of the person who experiences them, emphasizing the subjective investigation of experiences (although there are different theories and trends). Counselling psychology in recent years has placed particular emphasis on the meaning of life as a vital factor for human well-being (Brandau, 2008). Indeed several questionnaires were developed to measure life meaning, including the Purpose in Life Test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964), Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006), the Life Attitude Profile (Reker & Peacock, 1981), with each scale developed by using its own specific definition of life meaning.

Hence, the meaning in life is listed as one of four research areas where counselling psychologists could make significant contributions (Frazier et al., 2006). Counselling

psychology is therefore interested in research to learn more about the meaning in life either using quantitative or qualitative methods (such as the interpretive phenomenological analysis I use in this study) while existential psychotherapy tries to help people discover or create it. The same is true of the other qualities I explore such as attitudes and values in life (which are similar concepts that affect the meaning and sense of well-being in life). In this research I study how unemployed young educated Greek citizens make sense during the ten year economic crisis. Crisis as mentioned above is another term that applies to counselling psychology as psychologists are interested in better understanding the different crises in order to help people overcome and manage them.

All the terms I explored in this study are of interest to the discipline and my goal is both to provide new knowledge that will challenge specialists to better help their patients, and to fill a research gap in the literature on how people feel belonging to the research group I studied, as young people are the future of every country. I hope this study will help readers better understand the concerns of young unemployed professionals so that they are prepared to provide assistance when asked. I also aim to spread the model of existential psychotherapy both in Greece and in other countries facing crises, as it works with the rule that life is difficult, but worth living, as crises often evolve people both spiritually, psychologically and physically so that they can finally live a life full of prosperity. Existential therapy is an in-depth therapy that often requires people to invest time in it and for this reason it is not widespread in countries like Greece that prefers cost-effective solutions such as cognitive behavioral therapy which has a different philosophy and aims more at changing dysfunctional thought and behavior patterns. On the other hand, existential therapy aims at exploring the authentic self and a life that will harmonize with its needs.

# Chapter 2

# Literature Review

## 2.1 Background

"*Now there are times when a whole generation is caught … between two ages, two modes of life, with the consequence that it loses all power to understand itself and has no standards, no security, no simple acquiescence.* "– Herman Hesse, Steppenwolf (1927, as cited in May, 1950)

The literature review was the result of a thorough study on two different fields which were combined in a way that serves the research questions and the purpose of the research study. Specifically, the first field was that of the historical social and political economic literature and research, which served us to build an understanding background for the economic crisis in Greece in the decade 2009-2019. In this way the reader will understand, with facts and figures, how Greece was led to an informal bankruptcy, which had a huge impact on the lives of citizens and especially the middle and lower economic classes. For this field I procured (either from bookstores or from university libraries in Greece) almost all the English and Greek-language books available in print at that time which were related to the ten-year Greek economic crisis and its social and psychological implications. Although I read a lot of books that helped me get used to the topic, I chose to use what was written by academic writers (some of whom also have journalistic or political status), rather than books written only by journalists or politicians with directed political beliefs. In this way, and given the fact that there is a serious lack of academic literature on the subject, I wanted to ensure a basic level of academic rigour.

Then I searched for articles from Greek and English international journals in both Google and Google Scholar as well as in other databases such as JSTOR, PubMed, OpenAthens but also research portals such as researchgate.net and academia.edu. Examples of key words I used were "financial crisis", "Greek financial crisis", "financial crisis in Europe", "socio economic crisis", "effects of Greek financial crisis", "economic crisis effects", "economic crisis and mental health" both in English and in Greek. In the end I chose to use texts that were published in peer-reviewed journals and were more related to sociology and psychology than those written by economists and focused more on economic analyzes of the country's budget. To locate the official statistics on unemployment rates per year and age group, deaths due to suicide as a result of psychological effects and other useful statistics, I mostly used the website of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (https://www.statistics.gr/en/home/) which is the official public body providing official statistical information in Greece. In some cases, I looked for information in popular online and printed newspapers and magazines, mainly in order to observe and record the pulse of everyday life at that time.

The second field is that of existential thinking in psychology and psychotherapy which I used for two reasons. The first reason is for the reader to understand more deeply the meanings, attitudes and values of the participants who narrate their personal experiences during the years of crisis but also to help counselling psychologists and other readers to become familiar with existential thinking. This contributes to the understanding, interpretation and ultimately treatment of the difficulties that arise through the gaps and lack of basic human

needs such as the need for meaning in life (and ultimately their mental recovery and individual development that contributes to social development). The use of these concepts in therapy (either directly or through relational dynamics) contributes to the maturation, the exploration of the patient's self and the recognition of the responsibility they have to use their freedom to be associated with meanings that will free them from symptoms and will give them a sense of freedom in their life.

As you will see below, theories and views of important theorists and clinicians in the field of existential philosophy and psychology have been used in detail. From Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and Nietzsche (1844-1900) to Heidegger (1889-1976) and Sartre (1905-1980) in terms of philosophy, without forgetting to mention the ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle (384 -322 BC) and Epicurus (341-270 BC) and modern mental health experts such as Irvin Yalom (born 1931), Emmy Van Deurzen (born 1951) and others, who were inspired by existentialism, and based their own theories on those early philosophers and psychologists to use and create philosophical concepts related to human existence (e.g. the four givens of existence: loss, freedom, responsibility, meaning in life) which explain the feeling of stress, depression and alienation. This second field used many printed and digital books by reputable academics related to existential philosophy and psychology, through searches in bookstore databases (such as Amazon and Scribd) and libraries with keywords such as "meaning in life", "meaning and judgment". , "Impact of the economic crisis on values", "attitudes and economic crisis", "economic crisis and meaning". Similarly, articles were searched in peer reviewed journals related to research or phenomenological studies related to crisis and the search for meaning, the impact of crisis on attitudes and values, etc. Search engines such as Google and Google Scholar and databases were used. such as PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, PubMed and research portals such as academia.edu and researchgate.net.

## 2.2 The financial crisis in Greece (2008 - 2019)

### 2.2.1 What is a financial crisis?

A financial crisis is the phenomenon where the economy is characterized by a continuous and noticeable decline in its economic activity. The term economic activity refers to all the economic aggregates of the economy, such as employment, national product, prices, investments and so on. A financial crisis is often associated with a period of panic during which investors sell off assets or withdraw money from saving accounts (Tsafos, 2013).

### 2.2.2 Statistics

The fact that Greece is in bankruptcy was confirmed in 2010 following disclosures that the 2009 fiscal deficit was well above what would make debt sustainable (15.4% of GDP). In fact, the total debt till then amounted to 298 billion euros, which corresponds to 126.8% of GDP (Matsaganis, 2011). The causes of this debt are deeply hidden in the 1970s when Greece borrowed large sums after a period of dictatorial instability (1967-1974) resulting in its debt swelling, but also in the management of loans by banks and governments in the following decades.

By September 2008, and in the wake of the global financial crisis, debt was ebbing and the deficit on the treasury was going up. At the end of 2018, after lengthy negotiations and lending by the European Union and other international economic factors, debt had then reached 334.5 billion euros, equivalent to 181.1% of GDP (Matsaganis, 2018).

Although my study focuses on psychology issues such as the search for meaning, the evaluation of attitudes and values and how they are shaped in a society affected by the financial crisis, I thought it was appropriate to introduce these basic numbers to understand the magnitude of the disaster that plagues the country. However, it is not in my field of knowledge to analyze the causes of this catastrophe in economic terms which eventually led to unemployment rates that reached the highest peak (27.8%) in September 2013 while in April 2018 they were at 17.6% when the country was still experiencing a recession (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2018)

As it is easy to observe in the international press and in the official financial scientific article, the Greek crisis is mentioned as a fact that lasted from 2009 to 2018. However, this is an interpretation concerning the borrowing obligations between the Greek state and the institutions involved in the rescue agreements. In fact, the crisis is continuing and this is reflected in the labor market itself, the lifestyle and the feelings of those living in Greece in the shocking situation they have experienced over the last decade.

Searching for the rates, unemployment jumped from 7.3% in May 2008 (before the onset of the crisis) to 10.6% in December 2009 to 27.4% in December 2013 and then decreased to 20.9% in December 2017, starting to gradually improve. The last measurement was during April 2018 where the percentage was 17.6%. According to recent statistics, during the first semester of 2019, 47,500 young professionals (with bachelor and postgraduate studies) between 25 and 29 years old were still unemployed while 97,200 people (with bachelor and

postgraduate studies) between 30 and 44 years old were still unemployed (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2018).

Deaths from mental illnesses and suicides have also increased during the last decade and I noticed a significant increase in men over 50 years old. These people are those who lost their jobs with very few future career opportunities due to their age. Additionally, men of this age, do not usually ask for help from the mental health services (Rachiotis et al., 2015).

As you will notice from this study, such a crisis that has plagued the population for over a decade created implications for the physical and mental health of citizens as well as several other difficulties to the organization of the various communities can be described as social economic, and this term I chose to use in this text.

As a mental health scientist I cannot ignore the consequences for people and society by describing only the economic factors. According to Matsaganis (2018), the financial crisis, although painful, was not uniformly experienced by all social groups. This means that the income distribution has not decreased in parallel. Most people naturally saw their incomes decline, some staying steady while others even increasing. Also, some have lost much of their total income while others have lost less. The time of loss and reclassification of income was different too. This means that some lost income at the beginning of the crisis and later made up for it without undergoing long-term changes in the quality of their lives while others suffered severe losses that could not be addressed, and naturally affected what is called quality of life. The factors for these differences were mainly due to the field of their studies, field of work and age.

### 2.2.3 The socio-political changes

The socio-economic crisis in Greece marked very important political changes and social developments. The first signs of the crisis began to emerge rapidly with wage and pension cuts, layoffs and of course, the freezing of hiring new staff to reduce government spending. This has had major consequences for both the banking system, as it was impossible to repay the loans of citizens and businesses, as well as in the general private sector. Shops and businesses tried to cut their own costs too, either by reducing their workforce through layoffs, relocating their offices to other countries with lower tax rates, or closing (Varoufakis, 2017).

At the same time taxation was on the rise and new taxes were pouring into the lives of Greek citizens in order to increase the cash flow of public funds. Citizens overwhelmed by the painful consequences that had begun to manifest but also angry about the sudden violence that

had changed their lives were trying to change the political scene. Uncertainty generated continuous political change through elections that ultimately led to two events that are important to modern Greek history. The first event was referred to as the Left government in January 2015, but also the entry of an extreme nationalist party with 18 members into Parliament. The new government tried to negotiate support and lending agreements, but initially there seemed to be little in common with the European Union and international funds. This gradually led to market destabilization, uncertainty, lack of liquidity in the banks (as citizens feared withdrawing their deposits) and eventually the closing of banks in July 2015.

The result of this was the September 2015 elections where the same leftist government was re-elected to continue its policy. But the nationalist party also maintained its power. Two powerful poles had already begun to emerge. To understand the seriousness of the change, I must mention that the power of the extreme nationalist movement in the 2009 elections was 0.29% and reached 7% in the 2012 elections. Nationalist MPs and executives were put in jail for criminal acts and trials are pending to date (Varoufakis, 2017)

Of course, Greece did not suddenly fill up with neo-Nazi voters. The explosion of this political element was, as it turned out, a voice of despair from a part of the people who could not evaluate this party but managed their anger differently towards the system that brought the country into this situation through continued wrongdoing, policies and also corruption. Finally, in the recent July 2019 elections, the party received 2.9% (Ministry of Interior, 2019), which prevented it from entering the new parliament. In my opinion, this is because it has revealed its neo-Nazi face through criminal acts, but also because Greece has begun to gain a more solid economic outlook even though the crisis remains. As seen above, the unemployment rate has dropped even though the situation is still very difficult. So, in this decade we have experienced the different manifestations of a society of destabilization, uncertainty and economic misery. Expressions that had a positive and negative sign. Of course, these phenomena have not only occurred in Greece but also in many other countries that are experiencing economic or political destabilization such as Ukraine, Italy, Spain, or more recently Britain, which has been struggling with Brexit.

### 2.2.4 The migration issue in Greece

At this point I would like to briefly mention another issue which has contributed in its own way to the very real phenomenon of the social economic crisis. The issue of immigration refers to the systematic irregular entry of large numbers of immigrants to the country from 1990 to 2011. This issue arose mainly after the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe

in 1989 where people flocked from its northern border because of financial problems and looking for a better future. The process was followed by immigrants from Africa and Asia. As a result, the population of the country in 2010 was made up of 7% of immigrants outside the European Union, a phenomenon unprecedented for the country's indigenous population, which as we will see later took advantage of it (Varoufakis, 2017). The majority of these people still struggle to gain formal status and citizenship within Greece while living, working and being integrated into Greek society after many years of residence. Since 2010, Greece has mainly attracted war refugees (such as Syrians and Afghans), with many economic migrants using the country as a gateway to other more robust European states. Certainly troubled European agreements and conditions such as the so-called "Dublin 2" (Regulation 343/2003) force them to return to the first host country, namely Greece, which seems unable or unwilling to serve them (Varoufakis, 2017).

As I have said above, this issue is very real, and requires political and economic analysis which cannot be done within this text as it is not part of my specialty. However, I would like to note that Greece has always had a migratory culture as due to economic issues, especially before the 1990s, many Greeks chose the path of emigration, which we finally saw again after 2010 in another form. So, I raised the issue of immigration as I want to emphasize two things. Firstly, that this real difficulty has always been a cause for populism and propaganda, mainly for the sake of serving political parties who invested in the separation of the people in order to serve their own interests. But this, I think, is a global phenomenon, and secondly, that the social values of the Greeks, as they have been observed over the years, through their history and experience of constant wars, persecutions, refugees and destitution, do not contain any hatred towards their fellow human beings. However, as you can understand, poverty, austerity and most of all uncertainty are capable of pushing people into a rushed and spasmodic search for hope, especially when there is constant and daily propaganda. Of course, there will always be people with extreme positions, but they have never been the core and majority of the people in this country.


**2.2.5 Greek people in crisis as a cultural phenomenon**


According to Brewer (2016) during the last two centuries Greece has experienced many transnational and civil wars as well as corresponding declines in the economy and bankruptcies. It should be noted that these wars came after the Greek revolution of 1821 and the 400 years of occupation of the country by the Ottoman Empire, when the collective experience of the

Greeks in modern times sprang from the depths of the centuries. In modern history, the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, the First World War and the Asia Minor Campaign 1914-1922, the interwar period of 1922-1940, the Second World War of 1940-1944, the Civil War that lasted for three years ( 1946-1949) and led to political polarization of the country, the events of the dictatorship from 1967 to 1974 and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus at the same time are events that mark the long history of the Greek state, but also the gradual complete restoration of social freedoms from 1974 until today.

Gallant (2016) noted that in the cases of modern transnational wars, Greece was always able to defend its territories and interests defensively, without expansionist tendencies. Civil wars are a huge chapter in Greek history, usually rooted in ideologically different political positions on state governance and left long-term wounds worse than the age-old ideological divide between communists, left and right, and conservative politicians. I feel that this division is another reason why citizens have withdrawn from political engagement with the public in recent years (showing this in practice by abstaining from the 2019 elections, which had a 42% abstention rate) or by making political choices without having to really deal with the background of political parties historically, ideologically and politically. However, it seems that politicization has been adequately replaced by universal solidarity on issues that concern everyone and especially the economically weak groups (such as issues of refugee migration or natural disasters).

As a logical conclusion, the economic problems as well as the reactions of the citizens to get out of the crisis have a logical development based on the historical events but also the collective way of thinking of the Greeks, a people that has suffered and survived many crises and disasters with negative and positive effects on the collective mental mentality of the people but also on the economy and social policy. For example, it is certainly not a coincidence that the Greek people are resistant to hardships over time, militant even in the last moments (I recall the slogan of the Greek revolution against the Ottoman Empire "freedom or death"), but at the same time, in my opinion, impulsive in politics (as can be seen in the results of this survey, young participants show no real interest in politics), due to a lack of trust in governments that have always been sensitive to corruption issues.

### 2.2.6 Health, mental health and healthcare services

Before the crisis, healthcare was certainly not inadequate. According to Matsaganis (2011), from 2000 to 2009 total health expenditure increased from 8% to 10.2% thereby

increasing the per capita annual rate by 5.7%. In 2010 Greece had the highest number of doctors per person in Europe (6.1 doctors per 1000 citizens) which was almost double the European Union average (3.4). In addition, Greece had the highest number of MRI and CT scanners and other tests. Pharmaceutical expenditure had also increased reaching the highest position in Europe (per capita and in terms of purchasing power). It is good to note here that the price for much of this abundance was paid privately and not by public bodies. In 2008 the share of public health spending remained one of the lowest in Europe. In fact, although there was no shortage of specialized doctors or expensive biomedical technology, the reputation of hospitals remained low as costs for patients were high and private health costs were unbearable for lower income citizens.

According to a study by Simou and Koutsogeorgiou (2014) based on an approved systematic evaluation and quantitative and qualitative analysis of thirty-nine studies between January 2009 and March 2013, reductions in public health spending were identified with effects on marketed healthcare and pharmaceutical services. The increase in the number of public health imports has adversely affected the profitability of the public body, which has faced serious organizational problems as well as shortages of pharmaceutical materials and human resources. The evidence shows a decline in public health, with increased rates of mental health incidents, suicides, epidemics, otorhinolaryngological disorders and deteriorating self-assessed health. According to researchers, during the crisis years there is an ongoing effort to rebuild the Greek health care system that focuses more on reducing short-term costs, but which have long-term effects on the public health and care system.

According to Kentikelenis et al. (2011), although Greece provides insured citizens with the opportunity to visit free general practitioners or outpatient clinics at a cost of 0-5 euros, visits have decreased while hospital admissions have increased by 24% from 2009 to 2010 and an additional 8% in 2011. Additional employees reported occasional bribes given to medical staff to jump queues in overworked public hospitals. At the same time, citizens preferred public rather than private. This trend also shows a decrease in the income of citizens who can no longer support private insurance. The study shows that in 2010 there was a 25-30% drop in patient admissions to private hospitals. In addition, the study shows that vulnerable health groups were even more affected than the general population. Chronic patients cannot support their treatments financially, and in some cases, there may be a shortage of medicines. Researchers conclude that in an effort to reduce public debt, there is a drop in public health spending that ultimately affects citizens both in terms of prevention and ongoing diseases.

Rachiotis et al. (2014) specifically report that there are reports of a 40% reduction in the budget of state hospitals from 2009 to 2011. Researchers attempted to investigate the frequency of lack of medical supplies in two Greek hospital units of the national health system and to evaluate the potential impact on the exhaustion of healthcare workers. Prevalence of emotional exhaustion, deprivation, and low sense of achievement goals reached 44.5%, 43.2%, and 51.5%, respectively. Lack of medical supplies was significantly associated with emotional exhaustion and deprivation. The findings of the study provide evidence that austerity has affected health care in Greece both in terms of logistical supplies and human resources. The lack of medical supplies in Greek hospitals had already begun to reflect the evolving Greek crisis.

According to a study conducted by Drydakis (2015) using six annual waves of the longitudinal market study (LLMS), it was observed that unemployment affected both the physical and mental health of citizens between 2008 and 2013. As a result, physical and mental health had more harmful effects during periods of higher unemployment. The study also showed that the health of unemployed women was more affected than the health of men. However, as we have described in a previous section, women tend to seek help more often than men in Greek society (Matsaganis, 2013). Therefore, this finding is not, in my opinion, sound, which is partially confirmed by Economou et al. (2013) who reported an increase in the prevalence of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts in men, people with depression, married people who are experiencing financial stress, people with low interpersonal trust, and people with a history of suicide attempts in the past. This study was conducted with a random sample of 2192 and 2256 people who participated in 2009 and 2011. The study sample was the national telephone number database providing coverage of a large majority of households in the country. A random sample of random numbers of telephone numbers was selected from the list to interview 18 to 69-year-olds.

According to Kolaitis and Giannakopoulos (2015), in recent years a large percentage of Greek children have been living in poverty and social exclusion as a result of the socio-economic crisis. Reports have shown that rates of depression and suicide have increased in the adult population, but there are no studies in social groups of children. It is well known that poverty is a high-risk factor for children's development as the psychological stress associated with poverty has immediate effects such as severing education, child antisocial behavior and mental health problems. Researchers say that mental health professionals are constantly encountering a growing number of families facing complex psychosocial difficulties both in and out of hospitals. An additional striking example is the recorded number of children who

have been abused or neglected and admitted for protection to the country's largest pediatric hospital. The rate of these cases has increased from 81 in 2011 to 170 cases in 2014. In contrast, public funding cuts reached 50% in 2014 compared to 2007. This means that some services are not fully operational while others are on the brink of suspension. Many community mental health centres and psychosocial units were closed between 2012 and 2015. As a result, many parents have discontinued or delayed treatment of their children even for debilitating illnesses such as autism because of their inability to cover the costs that public insurance can no longer cover. While investing in children and supporting their families is a very important investment for the country, cuts in child and adolescent health seem to be a reality.

Unfortunately, I haven't been able to identify similar studies for the years 2015-2019 to report the corresponding trends in rates but if we look at unemployment rates that remained at similar levels from 2013 to 2018 (over 20%) I suppose the phenomena remained in similar contexts. It is only logical that the last three years are now being examined by researchers as data have recently been published by the Hellenic Statistical Authority (2018).

## 2.2.7 Unemployment

According to Matsagani (2013), the most striking feature of the so-called Greek crisis is the sharp rise in unemployment. The researcher notes that the unemployment rate had fluctuated around 10% in the first half of 2000-2010, and while it began to decline in May 2008 to 6.6%, it jumped to 1.4 million in May 2013, about 27.5% compared to 26.3% in Spain, 17.2% in Portugal, 13.5% in Ireland and 12.1% in Italy. 65% of all unemployed in Greece were out of work for more than 12 months in the first quarter of 2013, compared to 51.5% in the second quarter of 2008. These numbers always refer to the ages that constitute active human resources. With regard to professional qualities, the crisis seems to have begun to change the landscape in the acquisition of workforce skills. Highly skilled non-manual professions such as executives, followed by technicians and associates, accounted for just over half of the overall decline in employment. Specialized manual workers also experienced significant job losses. In contrast, job losses among low-skilled non-manual occupations such as office workers were offset by an increase in sales staff. The study comes to complement what my findings show. The positions of skilled and wealthy professionals are reduced compared to low-paid and temporary jobs that do not require specialization.

At this point it would be useful to note that one third of all workers in Greece are self-employed. This figure is also the highest in the European Union. According to Matsaganis

(2013), freelancers are a heterogeneous group of often small-scale farmers as well as traders, and freelancers in the field of science (health, legal and engineering). Here we observe a large number of people who either cannot work for agencies or choose to seek their own (as far as possible) conditions in a crisis society. Of course, these percentages also include subordinate work which is disguised as self-employment because companies now choose external permanent partners to carry out projects rather than employees (so that such self-employed are paid per project and cover their own costs). However, since the early years of the crisis we have seen job closures in the form of self-employed business closures. Despite that, the contraction in self-employment was slightly lower than in total employment. But it is noteworthy that many freelancers (doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc.), while seeming statistically active, nevertheless have zero revenue which means either they are tax evaders, or they simply keep their offices without a clientele.

During the crisis, social security agencies were caught between the increase in benefit claims and the reduction in income from contributions. In this context, the public employment service responsible for unemployment benefits has been unable to respond to the protracted recession. The eligibility conditions for eligible unemployed people have increased and an employee can now claim an unemployment benefit for a period of four years and after one year of fully insured work. Also, the level of benefits paid under unemployment insurance decreased in 2012 from € 454 to € 360 per month.

Another major problem that emerged during the crisis is undeclared work because it deprives the State of tax revenues and social security agencies of contributions due. In addition, they deprive the workers concerned of social rights, social benefits, health care and pensions. As mentioned above, there have been and are indications that healthcare has become difficult for workers who have lost their jobs or are unable to pay social security contributions. As you understand it is difficult to determine the rates of undeclared work, as well as its effects on society (Matsaganis, 2018). On the one hand we have employers who do not pay social contributions and can exploit workers, including blackmail, with illegal working hours without safe conditions and informal redundancies that cannot be protected by any employee laws. On the other hand, we have workers who, in desperation for survival, choose solutions that in the long run make their position in the social community difficult. It is enough to imagine how multifaceted the loss of undeclared work is to become the norm. A new law was enacted in 2013 to combat undeclared work by imposing heavy fines and it remains to be seen whether this was ultimately a factor in the gradual decline in unemployment from the experiences of the participants (Matsaganis, 2019).

A very important question that arose during the course of the economic crisis is whether the rich eventually became richer and the poor poorer. The answer is certainly not easy and so I will try to answer it through the statistics available to me. According to Matsaganis (2013) the income groups are affected differently, and it takes time to see how the overall income of the citizens is affected. During 2009 it was observed that the poorest 10% of the population lost a lower percentage of their income than the richest 10% (24.2% in the first group versus 29.4% in the second). However, in 2012 I note that the income of the poorest group had fallen 56.5% compared to the corresponding loss rate in 2009 and the average loss was 28.4% in the general population.

So it can be seen that before the crisis, the poor citizens lost less, but in the end they were the first to go into absolute poverty during the crisis. According to Matsaganis (2013), the increase in poverty affected families with children (due to unemployment) more than other types of households. The crisis also closed the income gap between men and women and reversed poverty rates among young people in urban areas and older ones in rural areas. While in the past the second category was more difficult, during the crisis the former took the baton (also due to unemployment at younger ages). Finally, the culture of people living in the city has changed quite a bit, as people have begun to share apartments and their expenses or return to their parents' homes to live with their parents or grandparents. The first phenomenon may be common for Europe, but it was unprecedented in Greece. Correspondingly the second phenomenon has existed in the past, however, for different cultural reasons

**2.2.8 Life and happiness satisfaction**

Matsaganis (2013) observed in the European Social Survey a sharp drop in happiness and life satisfaction especially compared to 2004 when Greece successfully hosted the Olympic Games in Athens, won the European Football Championship and came third in the tournament. Eurovision. Specifically, from 2004 to 2010, the average score on the question "How happy are you?" decreased by 12.3%, while on the question "How satisfied are you with your life?" the percentage decreased by 13.3%. During the same period, the question "How satisfied are you with the current state of the economy in your country?" the satisfaction rate decreased by 74.7%. Respectively, according to Matsaganis (2013), the decline in prosperity in Greece in the period 2010-2012 is part of a wider context of discontent in the countries of southern Europe, however, the prosperity losses in Greece were much greater than in the other countries affected by the crisis, namely Portugal, Italy and Spain. However, these losses can be explained

by the corresponding higher job loss, income and lower basic wage among these countries (from € 570 in 2009 to € 458 in 2012).

## 2.3 Philosophical and psychological framework

At this point I would like to explain why I chose to present the following theories which are related to existential psychology and influenced by existential philosophy. First of all, there are many ways to approach issues related to social crises, such as the economic crisis in Greece. I believe that the study of the financial crisis through the prism of existentialism brings to the surface remarkable aspects. At first, existentialism knows and accepts that life is not easy, but it faces challenges and difficulties as chances for psychological development and empowerment. Most people feel anxious when they have to cope with difficult situations, especially when they threaten their well-being or even their lives. However, since life brings difficulties on a social level, even when an individual is directly responsible for them, humans are called to survive, to learn from them and to choose how they want to manage them. For example, Yalom's (1980) theory of the four givens of existence, explains why people experience anxiety when they are confronted with meaning, loneliness, responsibility and loss. He calls them givens because we all feel and experience them potentially in our lives. In my opinion, social phenomena such as the economic crisis can cause different kinds of losses, loneliness and reprioritization of meanings and responsibilities, and as a result anxiety and psychological tension. Yalom's theory (1980) helps us to understand those givens and calls us to find a way to manage them according to our needs.

Van Deurzen's theory (2009) of the dimensions of existence, essentially depicts the needs that people have to take care of their physical body, their social life as well as their psychological and spiritual world. Crises call people to find a way to operate functionally within these dimensions, which is not at all easy, as the intensity of the threat is everywhere. However, this theory can act as a map of both our crisis difficulties and our needs. As you will see in the discussion chapter, I have placed the findings within these dimensions in order to understand the consequences (negative and positive) of a crisis on the individual's psyche.

So all the theories of existentialism that are listed aim to help the reader understand the findings through an existential prism. But also for counselling psychologists to become familiar with basic concepts that are useful both in clinical practice and in the interpretation of severe social phenomena, such as the Greek financial crisis, which is of universal interest as it can affect people at any time on a personal and social level.

### 2.3.1 The existential philosophy in psychology

The research and science of psychology are clearly imbued with philosophical and value assumptions which are not easy without the necessary training in matters concerning the philosophy of science (Gena, 2005, as cited in Tsakalos, 2005). This study aims to introduce the scientific reader to the existential and phenomenological theories with emphasis on the field of counselling psychology and psychotherapy. Looking into the philosophical background of psychological theories in depth will give a better understanding of both the specific sample of people studied based on my research questions, and will also allow a more comprehensive understanding of the science of psychology (in its existential area) and psychotherapy and how they raise questions about research and its applications. According to Gena (2005, as cited in Tsakalos, 2005) there is a close relationship between philosophy and psychology. Although the approaches follow distinctly different paths (mainly with the scientific trend of psychology which usually investigates relevance or a cause-and-effect relationship through numerical variables), they maintain their complementary relevance both theoretically and through research with methods such as phenomenology, which I will discuss below.

According to Tsakalos (2005), existential and phenomenological theories have their starting point in the field of classical Greek philosophy (Plato, Socrates, Epictetus), and later from the middle of the 19th century were expanded and modernized by Western European thought. The dynamic penetration of existential thought in the field of psychology and counselling began after World War II due to ideological and social revisions that sought to offset the painful effects of global conflicts and to help the collective and individual consciousness of concepts such as freedom, meaning, the human right to interpret events differently and to communicate them with the aim of communication and learning that arises from it. Democracy was based on dialogue, communication of views and the prevalence of numerically stronger opinions with respect for the collective opinions of the community. Aristotle did not fail to formulate thoughts that connect the subjectivity of perception and personal empirical knowledge with the social character they acquire through speech (Tsakalos, 2005).

Reason and communication give a dynamic and evolutionary character to knowledge which is able to structure rules of social behavior, collective ethics, language and ultimately influence the way people relate to each other. However, it is understandable that many times the experiences (and the knowledge produced by them), and the emotions can not only be

individual but also collective, depending on the extent of the event or its enforcement. For example, a world war has enormous power to affect the way a person experiences everyday life. Even if one is in the position of the powerful, the experience of war contains so much violent exaggeration that it will affect the way one can experience oneself or one's community compared to times of peace and equality. In essence, this study seeks to study existential concepts, such as meaning, attitudes, and values, in a group of people who, while studying and investing in development in order to achieve expectations (whether academic, professional, or emotional), found themselves in a situation, an external constraint, an economic crisis and had to live with them.

The findings of my study showed how the crisis affected a group of the population and the way in which young professionals ultimately create or explore meanings, what their attitudes and life values are and whether they maintain or change them due to circumstances. Based on the analyses it will be seen whether these experiences have an individual or collective basis. Of course the findings cannot draw general conclusions as I spoke with only 8 people. However, as can be seen below, the goal of phenomenology is not generalisation, but the knowledge produced by the experiences of a sample selected according to specific criteria. Here I studied how crisis and unemployment affected the exploration and creation of meaning through the words of eight people who met my criteria. Certainly through the process, knowledge was produced to be understood and to concern the scientific community and not to be generalised.

Every crisis brings losses. Loss as a given of existence (Yalom, 1980), activates the stress which people have to manage. Stress is often an existential opportunity for change and development. It is a mechanism that sends a message to the body that it is threatened and has to do something to feel safe again. Through this logic people often do the best they can to return to safety. One would think that no one wants to hurt themselves, unless of course there is a distorted perception of how they perceive the issues of existence. Existence contains pain, and pain often becomes a challenge and a guide. Let us not forget Sisyphus (Camus, 1942) who tries to find his meaning and freedom through the fact that he "must" lift the rock. By this logic, external constraints on life such as crises or wars, although painful, restrictive or even harmful to existence itself, are not capable of destroying the possibility of a sense of freedom, as it is inherent. I believe that this is possible if one is familiar with these existential concepts. This is exactly the purpose of this study. To introduce the mental health professional to these existential concepts but also the concerns of people living under the regime of a social crisis so that they can help them live their lives better. However, I hope that this study will help the

ordinary reader or scholar to understand both the existential concepts described, the phenomenology, but also to reflect on the findings of the research, and all this to lead them to reflection with the aim of their own well-being and connection with the deepest self.

**2.3.2 The existential approach to counselling psychology**

According to Georganda (2021) the existential approach to counselling psychology is not a single approach nor does it have a specific way of working. It is mainly due to a philosophical approach which consists of four basic paths, but which share common views such as the right of people to live authentically and to learn to use their innate freedom to choose the way they want to live independently from the limitations of each period, use the phenomenological method through which the therapist seeks to be present and committed, without expectations in a true psychotherapeutic relation with the person who acquires a therapeutic relationship. At this point it could be said that phenomenology in the therapeutic relationship has a common philosophy in the way it is used as a research approach through phenomenological interpretive analysis, as the researcher is present to listen and record without interventions, personal experiences, experiences and meanings of the participant. During the process of those experiences the therapist treats them with respect, giving interpretations that try to be as close as possible to the authentic experience, without of course ignoring their own reflective dynamics in how they perceive and experience what is recorded, and then it has to be written in a text.

I think it is important to mention these four schools of existentialism even briefly, as they have influenced me as a psychologist and researcher, each creating in its own way the foundations of my way of thinking. As you will notice from my literature review I give special emphasis to two of them (existential phenomenology and mainly the existential humanitarian approach) as I found in them my own way to act authentically in my different roles in life as a professional and everyday person. This does not mean that the other paths do not lead to awareness and to deeper dialogue with oneself and others through slightly differentiated routes.

So according to Georganda (2021), we have the school of Dasein analysis started by Binswanger (1881-1966) and Boss (1903-1976) and is based on Freud's theory and the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger (1979, as cited in Georganda, 2021). Binswanger (1956, 1958, as cited in Georganda, 2021) wanted to apply the phenomenological method to psychiatry and psychopathology while Boss (1988) applied the phenomenological interpretation to the psychotherapeutic practice with the help and constant contact he had with

Heidegger (1979). The word Dasein, a term used by Heidegger (1979), denotes presence, existence, a being who has the ability to comprehend existence including their own, who find themselves struggling and living in a world inseparable from them (Craig, 1986). According to Georganda (2021), the word 'analysis' has a Greek root and means the solution and unfolding of the original meaning of things. Dasein analysis is an interpretive process that frees the human being to be able to claim their right to exist and to unlock their potential to claim an authentic way of living in the world (Craig, 1986).

The second approach is often referred to as the "British School" and is called existential phenomenology. It is based on the phenomenology of Brentano and Husserl (1978, as cited in Georganda, 2021) and other philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty. According to Van Deurzen (2009), the roots of the approach are found in Ancient Greek philosophy and especially in the maieutic method of Socrates, so the person is led to wonder about their views and learn to be open to other ideas. The existential phenomenological therapist enters a real dialogue with the intention of exploring in depth the world of the other in search of greater awareness of their worldview. The dialectical view allows for the existence of multiple interpretations and highlights the paradoxical (and often the irrationality of human existence), the complexity of relationships with oneself and others, the contradictions, dilemmas and conflicts of life. My training at the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling (NSPC), the foundation founded by Van Deurzen, has inevitably influenced my work both psychotherapeutically and research-wise, and the way I think and work in this study contains this influence which the reader will be able to understand better later.

The third approach is called existential-humanitarian and was developed in the United States by May (1950, 1986), Ellenberger (1958 as cited in Georganda, 2021), and Bugental (1965, 1978, 1987) among others. The approach became known thanks to the work of Yalom (1980) and expands on existential-humanistic and existential synthetics by the work of Schneider and Krug (2010). According to Schneider (2019), the approach aims to free the individual to be able to stand as a separate entity and respond to life's dilemmas and challenges instead of simply reacting to them. The approach emphasizes both the possibilities of people and their limitations, which have to be managed or even transformed into opportunities with the aim of re-meeting with the authentic self, living a free life without the feeling that they are guided by the crises which inevitably happen. Existential humanistic psychology began with influences from the third American psychology wave of Maslow, Rogers, May, and Moustakas (Georganda, 2021), a wave clearly influenced by the philosophy of European existential philosophers. In the present study I have used several theories, mainly of Yalom (1980), who

communicated the essence of existential thinking to the general public, trying to help people to reconcile with their stress, and to interpret it through the prism of normal processes and data in human existence such as loss, loneliness, the search for meaning, the responsibility that arises as a natural consequence of freedom.

Finally, the last approach to existential therapies is that of logotherapy and existential analysis introduced by Frankl (1967, 1984) who wanted to emphasize the spiritual dimension and especially the importance of finding meaning instead of Freud's 'will to pleasure' and 'will to power' by Adler (Georganda, 2021). According to Georganda (2021), in Austria in 1990 a significant change in existential analysis was initiated by Langle (2019), who introduced the phenomenological method as a practice in psychotherapy and broadened the concept of the search for meaning in finding 'inner consent', concepts similar in compatibility to Rogers ( 1965).

I believe that this concise knowledge of the four approaches to existential psychology and thought would be useful to the reader in order to better understand the background in which both the idea for this study, and sections such as reflexivity on the part of the researcher were born. Respectively, it builds the background of thought in the interpretation of the data but also in the discussion which connects these findings with the theories in the literature section. At the same time, it is an introduction for the scholar who shows interest in these schools of thought and the way in which they approach people both therapeutically and academically as well as in research.

### 2.3.3 Existential phenomenology

According to Spinelli (2005) existential phenomenology argues that humans do not always have absolute freedom of choice. Worse still, there are conditions in which there is no choice at all. Starting from the fundamental facts of existence, none of us chose to exist. Instead, each of us is thrown into existence. In the same way, it seems that none of us have a choice about the fact that our lives at some specific point in time, will certainly be "thrown out" of existence as we will cease to exist as a human being.

In addition, we are also "thrown" into a particular body, at a particular time, into a particular culture, into a specific set of dominant behaviors and morals, attitudes and opinions. All of this is also beyond any choice, as they are the infinite number of stimuli or events that the world "throws" at us, to which we are all bound to respond. According to this logic no Greek citizen chose to live in this part of history and under these conditions (although Greek

history contains various times/periods/eras of suffering). Thus, the options that may actually exist are always placed within a dataset of extraneous conditions, the presence of which we can neither choose nor control.

On the other hand, it is the way people interpret phenomena through the way they think and the very unique way they experience it. I know people who did not experience crisis while living in it. They were not necessarily wealthy but had an optimistic attitude and were trying to turn the stress that surrounded them into an existential opportunity, to challenge themselves and to become better through it. I know others who have chosen with similar financial condition to grumble, fear, withdraw and isolate. We, existential therapists have phenomenally synthesized the puzzle that makes up the lives of our clients, naturally integrating it into the social context. Everyone was aware of the crisis, everyone was experiencing it as a social phenomenon, but some were just trying to stay on the sidelines and watch it. They may have been the ones providing a plate of food at their table, but I saw many homeless people smiling at the offer of their fellow men as I saw rich people with fearful and ruthless faces and insecurity about reducing their business turnover. But for everyone it was important what they experienced, and their attitude largely defined how they experienced their own body and themselves in the world with others. According to Spinelli (2005) given the "jump" in life is one of the many issues that existential theory deals with but existential issues such as the dipoles and paradoxes of life, existential loneliness, the uniqueness and diversity of existence, temporality and inevitable death, the embodiment of being, existential anxiety and guilt, the lack of meaning and the value of finding meaning, the freedom and responsibility it entails as well as the authenticity - the authenticity of existence.

Existentialism places great emphasis on both responsibility and will. They are two important concepts that are of particular importance both in psychotherapy and in everyday life. Each person is the driver of change in their lives, often regardless of the society they live in or the circumstances. I am not of course saying that these do not play a role, but as I wrote before, we do not choose the point of the story to be born nor the conditions that will prevail. However, using our will we can make the effort needed to contribute to individual change and why not to social change. After all, all social change had a starting point. According to Rollo May (1950), will and freedom are those inherent commodities that can take advantage of responsibility and the right to live a full life. By taking responsibility for our actions and recognizing our freedom even in the most oppressive of circumstances, we mature and realize the greatness of authentic life. Many see the word consistency as something negative. Existentialism perceives it as a result. Through the exercise of freedom and the result we

become wiser even if it turns out that we were wrong. That will be our mistake, and if we can evaluate it as such we will be led right in as we know what we must not repeat. This, of course, implies an open attitude but also an ability to evaluate while respecting the notion of authenticity in ourselves and in others.

**2.3.4 Authenticity**

According to Van Deurzen (2010), the term authenticity refers to a person's ability to understand and accept that human life is physically limited. Hence, the person is responsible to understand life, and live it under their own will. Van Deurzen (2010) noted that there is no authentic action, but authentic attitude towards the very own existence of every person. Everyone has a chance to explore their own truth and live authentically according to it. This is a hard task because life is often harsh, complicated and full of physical limitations. Therefore, it is very common for a person to be unable to continuously support this attitude. As a result, the person denies the responsibility of their own existence, loses their freedom, and lives inauthentically.

All these issues and philosophy raised have been discussed in some way with many of my clients. I have observed that people who love literature and philosophy, tend to say that "philosophy heals in these difficult times". This study was inspired both by my own life, as a young man living through a modern socio-economic crisis, as well as, from my interest in the philosophy of courage, and existential anxiety.

My own struggle to find the courage to be both authentic and emotionally and economically autonomous turned me more towards the study of philosophy which gave me inspiration. According to Buber and Smith (2000), being independent means that someone can see others as independent and responsible for their own choices. As a result, people learn how to provide space for themselves and others, respecting each other's choices. In that way, relationships become mature, improving the sense of companionship via autonomy and self-respect. Heidegger in his work "Being and Time" (1979), wrote about this and refers to the need of Dasein to recognise the possibilities available, and the very personal responsibility that one has upon one's own existence. Dasein is an expression, referring to the experience of being present (exist) as a part of the world of others while alone with the self. Heidegger (1979) used the concept of Dasein in order to show the engagement and involvement of "Being-in-the world". The world involves the contribution of the self because the self is a part of it. As a result, every living being plays a certain role to the world under the way that they perceive it.

The opposite of the authentic self is the inauthentic Dasein, as a tendency of escaping to the daily reality, the anonymous, identical world of the They and the Them. The framework of such existential philosophy and personal study played an important role in the formulation of my own interest of exploring youth's meaning in a period of crisis. I chose youth, because I felt the need to pay attention to the most well-educated part of the population, which is somehow forgotten by the state, though ironically, they are the country's hope for a productive future.

### 2.3.5 Crisis in existentialism

According to Van Deurzen (2009) crisis is always a possibility. What is most frustrating in a crisis is that it reminds people of the vulnerability of being. Crisis needs action which comes from the use of a person's freedom to make certain decisions and act. In crisis there are no guarantees but there are usually possibilities that people tend to deny, acting as passive observers rather than active creators. Uncertainty is a part of crisis that usually disturbs the sense of freedom and responsibility. Jean-Paul Sartre (1943, as cited in Yalom, 1980) wrote that to be responsible is to be the uncontested author of an event or a thing.

### 2.3.6 The different levels of crisis

**Physical crisis**

According to Van Deurzen (2009), physical crises are the ones that affect the safety of humans' physical bodies. Physical crises usually refer to physical illness of the individual or other individuals that can be caused by natural causes. Before the emotional effects of a natural deterioration come to the surface, individuals try to restore their physical safety by natural or other means. Physical crises can be caused by natural phenomena (for example, hurricanes, floods, drought), violence, wars, accidents or diseases and they need personal care (and other means like food and shelter) to be treated. As we mentioned earlier, most of the times physical decay or disaster is accompanied by an emotional effect and usually the combination of the two will result in a trauma. Loss of givens, such as the loss of physical health (of the self or beloved others), or loss of housing and property, can lead to a disorganization of the self which gradually loses their sense of security. Through such events, people usually lose their vital energy, and it is common to develop tendencies of resignation or reject reality.

Of course, such defense responses will be short-term and will bring physical and emotional survival to further danger. Unfortunately, physical crises, disrupt what people

considered as known or established, and require particularly painful ways of recovery. Van Deurzen (2009) noted that in such situations people seek to return to normality rather than happiness. Between 2009 and 2019, the citizens of Greece continuously experienced such a crisis that came to provoke what they considered to be a given. Unemployment, the loss of income, economic migration of family loved ones, and especially of youth, lack of resources or facilities in households (food, energy or even accommodation), and lack of resources in health care and education systems, have created a continuous and chain crisis at both individual and social level. The worst consequence is of course the loss of human lives from suicides or illnesses due to lack of crucial care in physical and mental health (Varoufakis, 2020).

**Social crisis**

According to Van Deurzen (2009), a social crisis can affect who we are in many aspects. For example, a separation or a divorce can redefine the relationship with oneself as the person is suddenly no longer half of a couple. Hence, they must deal with a new role, probably out of the previous comfort zone or habits. Even if the separation is a choice, it brings changes. If it's not a choice, the consequences could be worse. According to Van Deurzen (2009), in times of social crisis people tend to criticize others for their choices. People who criticize, usually cannot empathize or put themselves in a similar role as they think that they would have managed the situation differently and would not be experiencing a crisis. Of course, this attitude is most likely to lead to painful results because people who think that they have total control of their lives will suffer equally or even more when they have to cope with the effects of a social crisis on them. Van Deurzen (2009) claimed that these are the same people who usually think that the harsh moments of life could be avoided, or the wounds of a crisis are (personal) failures. Therefore, these people's personal identity could be negatively affected after a painful event such as a crisis. The problem here according to Van Deurzen (2009) is the lack of social tradition to help people stand next to each other in such situations. Additionally, people tend to avoid problems or difficult situations of others even if they are close friends or family members. Finally, under this attitude of disinterest, a framework is created where problems can flourish and that sooner or later will spread to a wider social context.

Therefore, it seems that it is very difficult for people to take responsibility for things that do not seem to concern them directly. However, Van Deurzen (2009) emphasizes the paradox that when people eventually find the power or want to deal with situations that do not seem to concern them directly, but are universal issues, they make their own reality better. She admits that it is difficult for someone to take a stance on something that does not seem to

concern them as they can pay a price or get hurt. However, the happiness that so many of us seek is reached through an active attitude for earning safety and prosperity. This security could be earned in a personal and social context through continuous effort. Unfortunately, many people think that these qualities in life should be consistently given under a passive attitude without any painful efforts.

**Personal crisis**

Even if a person could avoid a physical or social crisis, it is very likely they will have to face a personal crisis. This type of crisis could be triggered by a personal experience of failure. In such a case, the person feels inadequate in relation to themselves or others, challenging even issues related to their self-identity. The difficult part of a personal crisis is the recovery from harsh feelings (such as guilt, shame, anxiety and sadness), by developing methods for coping and dealing with a situation in a way to regain a sense of being skilled and optimistic. Courage and patience are essential elements for someone to recover and get back on track. These qualities contribute to both the development of wisdom and self-esteem as well as to their preservation (Van Deurzen, 2009).

**Spiritual crisis**

According to Van Deurzen (2009), a spiritual crisis is related to the loss or confrontation with everything people otherwise assumed as a given (such as value, deeper idea or worldview). Usually someone who is confronted with a spiritual crisis, doubts not only the world and others but also the meaning of life itself. Such crises improve the individual in many aspects and should be taken seriously. Heidegger (1979) noted there are moments in life that nothing is given, and people have to stand out of themselves rather than hiding inside themselves. This "ecstatic" (as he named it) experience would then be experienced as care, providing a deeper understanding of the self. According to Van Deurzen (2009) this is the only attitude that a person has to develop and keep, since the crisis is about themselves, in order to learn how to manage better their own existential space, giving more opportunity for things that matter.

**2.3.7 Existential freedom**

According to Warnock (1970, as cited in Yalom 1980), the common interest which unites existential philosophers is the questioning of human freedom. Additionally, the concept of

freedom and its attendant responsibility was crucial for the developing of existential psychotherapy as a philosophical approach to therapy. According to Yalom (1980), existential psychotherapy operates on the fundamental belief that each individual experiences inner conflicts as a reaction to their confrontation with the so-called givens of existence. His theory emphasized four primary concerns which were death, freedom and associated responsibility, meaninglessness, and existential isolation.

Hence, our quality of life is affected by how we deal with these four givens. Yalom (1980) refers to the givens as the ultimate concerns that lie deep in the subconscious of every human being. Greening (1992) understands these givens as a paradoxical dialectic procedure that poses a number of challenges to our lives. Similarly, Yalom (1980) believed that coping with these givens, and accepting them as a part of life, is an important part of dealing with and facing anxiety even if the confrontation with it is painful (but also challenging).

Understandably, the inability to manage life through these givens can create severe anxiety and other mental health problems. The following paragraphs illustrate these givens as discussed by Yalom (1980) and other important existential philosophers and psychologists.

### 2.3.8 The four givens of existence: an explanation of the confrontation with anxiety in crisis

**Death**

According to Yalom (1980) death is perhaps the most obvious of the existential concerns. The fear of death influences humans' internal experience. Frankl (1984) noted that humans live in a constant state of existential terror because they know that death could be there at any time. Death anxiety subconsciously affects behavior and creates perceptions of what life is. Even a young child is preoccupied with the fear of death, while a developmental task is to deal with their fears. The concept of death is so emotionally strong that it is able to shape the character structure both effectively and ineffectively. Hence, the lack or dysfunctional management of death can create psychopathology while effective acceptance can be transformed into an opportunity for a healthy development in so many aspects. According to Yalom (1980), even an effective approach to psychotherapy can be constructed on the foundation of death-awareness.

Death is universal, how people deal or respond to it depends on when, where, and how they live (Walter, 2020). In several profession, such as medical doctors and hospice staff, we are forced to manage and think of death on a daily basis.

According to Heidegger (1979), death is the ultimate limitation of possibilities and for this reason has so much power in the human soul. On the other hand, the possibilities of life are endless giving us opportunities to live a full life. Having in the back of our minds that death is certain at some point, we can lead to a mindful way of living.

Generally, modern societies ensure a more secure life for their population but can also create considerable fear and insecurity in many circumstances. Economic security and insecurity influence many aspects of death, dying and grieving as well as the way people think about their own and significant others' death during their lives. For example, the death or upcoming death of an elderly person who is no longer economically active or raising children can leave a big emotional hole for the family survivors or agony for the person who is going to die but does not bring about economic loss that the death of a working-age parent can cause. This could affect the way one experiences their own impending death from a terminal disease as well as the way others experience the loss. Likewise, the death of a child, once all too common, now is deemed unnatural in Western societies. Thus, parents who lose a child today, may also lose their faith in God who let such a thing happen (Walter, 2020). Thus, Walter (2010), claimed that every culture, which also entails a belief system or systems, which may or may not be religious, affects how people deal with death.

For example, the ancient Greeks despaired over death precisely because life and the body offer so many pleasures. They also realized that completely succumbing to the body's demands for pleasure is the path to death (Choron, 1963). To solve that problem, Greeks put an emphasis on thought as the path for freedom. In Greek thought focusing on the management of the body's desires for pleasure, under the principles of freedom through conscious choices, would enable someone could live a meaningful life as they wish even if death remained a limitation (Moore & Williamson, 2003).

In mainstream Christianity, ideas developed around an eternal life after death in a heavenly location with no further suffering. Many theologians associated with mainstream Christianity claimed that heaven has evolved into a philosophical state of mind as older interpretations have not proven effective for finding meaning in life but only comforted many individuals in their search for adequate mechanisms to confront death (Bryant et al., 2003).

There are also spiritual traditions like Buddhism whose philosophy of life is quite connected with death. Buddhists believe that death is a natural part of the life circle and inevitable but can be resolved if people devote themselves to finding a solution to this existential dilemma. They also believe that the spirit is not extinguished upon death but instead

transfers into another life. By this kind of thinking and practice they can transcend death and live their current lives with a sense of fulfilment (Wright, 2017).

As can be seen from these various philosophies, over time and across cultures, our understanding of the nature of death has changed and evolved according to the living conditions of the different traditions and eras.

In addition, the fear and the idea of death extends to the concept of loss. During our lives we have to cope with many deaths (real or symbolic), such as those of loved ones (real) or losses of objects or property or ends in relationships, job contracts etc. The concept of loss is always there in one way or the other. Learning to deal with their own limited time on earth, people can also achieve acceptance of other losses (Van Deurzen, 2009). At this point, I would like to note that the majority of Greek citizens came across serious losses during the years of crisis, as they had (and still have) to cope with economical losses, family losses (because of immigration or suicides) and job losses.

**Freedom and responsibility**

According to Van Deurzen (2011), freedom and responsibility are central themes of existential thought. They refer to the recognition of our free, personal competence for our choices and actions. It is important to note that abstaining from choice is also a choice and the only choice that we don't have is to not choose. There are always choices, even under certain physical, social or other random limitations that are out of our personal control. According to Yalom (1980), responsibility is to be aware of creating one's own destiny, even one's own suffering. In therapy the one who persists in blaming others for his own dysphoria will probably fail to heal. Responsibility often needs engagement and commitment. According to Van Deurzen (2010), engagement for people is to allow themselves and others to be important and being able to care for their lives actively. There is always a choice for the person to disconnect from their own experiences in order to avoid the harsh times of life. On the other hand, humans can commit themselves and live their lives to the fullest despite the difficulties.

Existential freedom is the means for someone to choose, thus creating possibilities and live with the outcomes and consequences of those choices. It is a right of a human to be actively present in their own life. People have the ability to decide for themselves and to be independent concerning their behaviours and thought even in periods of extreme limitations and crisis. Hence, people often come across dilemmas and challenges that in the end may unfold new opportunities and chances for development.

**Isolation**

According to Yalom (1980), no matter how close one becomes to another there is always an unbridgeable gap. Existential isolation refers to the fact that all humans come to this life alone and leave alone. Many could argue that usually a baby comes to its parents' arms or someone could leave this world under the care of their beloved ones. However, existential isolation refers mostly to the concept that everyone is completely responsible for creating and living their own life authentically. Every human perceives life differently, and even if they have many people to share their moments, ideas and values, the unique experience of every person could not be completely the same. This realisation brings what is called existential loneliness, as people's consciousness can fully experience or own unique experiences. These unique experiences and memories will die with them.

**Meaninglessness**

According to Yalom (1980), the human being needs meaning. Considerable distress may also arise when someone's life is devoid of meaningful qualities such as values, ideals and goals. Frankl (1984) noted that humans could not survive if they were not able to create purpose or meaning in their lives. Therefore, we can imagine the pain that derives when a person is confronted with lack of meaning or purpose. Yalom (1980) claimed that even people who directly face death can live better lives if they are possessed with a sense of purpose. In that sense, we can understand that purpose and meaning do interact with the sense of freedom. Those who have lost meaning or purpose, may feel that their freedom is diminished. On the other hand, someone could argue that freedom is always there to contribute to meaning making in a universe with no guidelines for creating purpose or meaning other than those the individual creates. Hence, a fundamental assumption is that people live in a universe that has no collective meaning for all (or no meaning at all). One might wonder if this is itself a limitation on the individuals' ability to create meaning and purpose.

At this point it would be useful to further clarify the concepts of meaning and purpose. Yalom (1980) refers to meaning as a sense or coherence while he describes purpose as an intention, aim or function. The majority of times, in conventional, daily usage, the terms "purpose of life" and "meaning of life" are closely related, and mostly refer to the "cosmic meaning of life". The cosmic meaning of life concept discusses if human life fits into some overall coherent pattern. Yalom (1980) was influenced by several philosophers like Aristotle who used the term "terrestrial meaning", when they were referring to functions to be fulfilled for someone to possess a sense of meaning in life. In simple words, cosmic meaning refers to

an external and superior order of the universe, while the terrestrial meaning describes something secular, for example, the very personal meaning of an individual without the need of a cosmic meaning. Hence, according to Yalom (1980), it is easier to imagine someone who possesses a sense of cosmic meaning to experience a corresponding sense of terrestrial meaning. That is because the terrestrial meaning (as something that derives from and directs to secular life), harmonizes with the significant cosmic meaning. Of course, one could, while perceiving a central cosmic meaning, have difficulty finding or creating a terrestrial one. On the contrary, one could create their own personal secular meaning, without having to think, accept, perceive or recognize a cosmic, more significant, one.

Similarly, the central concern of Camus (1955) in his book "The Myth of Sisyphus", is what he calls "the absurd". Camus (1955) used that term to describe the situation where every human searches for order, meaning, and reasons in life, and instead they find uncertainty and chaos. In other words, Camus (1955) noted that we will never find in life itself a universal meaning. Additionally, he opened a dialectic monologue questioning that if life has no central meaning, this could lead to suicide while he was more interested in the possibility that humans accept to live in a world that is devoid of meaning or purpose. Van Deurzen (2009), claimed that the ability to determine meaning and purpose can only be achieved when the individual can accept and withstand lack of meaning. Furthermore, the belief that the individual can define the meaning of their own life is essential in existentialism and psychotherapy. In this research I will try to explain and connect those assumptions with the way that the Greek youth create meaning in an unstable and uncertain period while the country suffers from the socio-financial crisis. In my opinion it is useful for social scientists (such as counselling psychologists and psychotherapists) to understand how young professionals formulate their way of searching and finding meaning while they have spent a major part of adolescence and adulthood living with uncertainty.

The existential thinking (the framework of existential psychotherapy) gives emphasis to the issue of crisis. Cooper (2003) claimed that existential philosophy refers to human lived existence by focusing on qualities such as the relational exploration of the self and others as well as the right of every human to live authentically utilizing their inherent freedom. Finally, a phenomenological research like this also focuses on the very own personal explanations of lived experience. Phenomenology, existential philosophy and existential psychology, are parallel disciplines, as they all pay attention and honour our very essence. Paradoxes, conflicts, difficulties and dilemmas are daily companions, with crisis present here and there in different periods. Thus, life is full of positive and negatives, tensioning between the opposites. These

opposites make life worth living, as without struggles there is no sense of relief or happiness. The way that someone responds to those conflicts depends on several factors such as their resilience, strengths, skills, worldviews and other qualities. Flexibility, courage and presence of mind are some key qualities for someone to survive in such periods (Van Deurzen, 2002).

**2.3.9 The four dimensions of existence as a map for well-being**

There is much to be learned from the theory of four dimensions concerning the nature of human existence. The human body and psyche relate and interact with the natural, social, psychological and spiritual world in certain ways. Furthermore, people seek security in order to explore and develop their inherent potential and freedom in order to live authentically. On the other hand, we understand that limitations such as economic problems often reduce people's sense of freedom. These kinds of limitations can also be considered as existential chances to explore deeper needs and develop human potential (Van Deurzen, 2010). By presenting the theory of four dimensions, I aim to help the reader understand the complexity of human nature by exploring the positive aspect of human needs that sometimes has to overcome the negative pole of fear. It seems that the socio-economic crisis in Greece creates a chance for citizens reviewing what they considered as granted and gain a deeper awareness of both their fears and their potential. At the discussion part of the final research I plan to discuss several points of my findings according to this theory. In my opinion this will help the reader understand more deeply what crisis means under existential philosophy and terminology.

For Van Deurzen (2009) existential philosophy and therapy aims to enable people to live their lives with confidence, even if it is harsh in certain periods. Life is full of constant changes, and still not easy. However, it's possible to live well by accepting difficulties, considering them as existential challenges as well as opportunities, to develop ourselves for a better future. Existentialism suggests that it is possible for people to embrace and accept their human condition (that also includes aloneness, meaninglessness and mortality), connect with others, and use their freedom to choose and take full responsibility for their choices. For example, if someone suffers from feelings of meaninglessness, they have the responsibility as well as the right to choose and explore new meanings. Making changes is a harsh task but it seems financial crisis calls for changes. According to Van Deurzen (2010) happiness is an outcome of well-being and can be elicited via the procedure of living life as it is. Existential therapies deal with wellbeing, health and happiness via a philosophical manner. Income, wealth and joblessness, are among the measures on which economists have traditionally focused.

Rationally people can assume that well-being and standards of living have been affected but this is something that cannot be easily measured quantitatively. Instead, people suppose that it can be explored verbally through qualitative research such as this project.

Cooper (2003), conceptualized the givens as paradoxes and tensions of the four-dimensional realms of human existence, the physical (Umwelt), social (Mitwelt), personal (Eigenwelt) and spiritual (Uberwelt), structuring a theory model which may lead to personal fulfilment and wisdom through acceptance of what life and its principles are. The existential approach to philosophy and psychotherapy does not distinguish people according to their personalities. The theory helps to recall the multidimensional qualities of one's existence. These dimensions contain challenges and limitations that need to be addressed by using our personal inborn freedom and the resulting responsibility. Similarly, the person has to find the courage to accept or make peace with the difficulties that create anxiety without being resolved. The paradox is that by embracing the process of dealing with or accepting the unresolved restrictive issues by holding an active attitude, people can transform these experiences into opportunities that will contribute to ttheir personal development and prosperity.

**Physical dimension (Umwelt)**

According to Van Deurzen (2009), the physical dimension is related with the environment in which people live and the natural world that surrounds them. The physical dimension illustrates their relationship with the physical world and mortality. Hence, it includes the body they have, the environment, the weather and climate, the materials they possess as well as their potential for being healthy or sick. Within the physical dimension a person is given battle is to accept the physical limitations and boundaries.

**Social dimension (Mitwelt)**

The social dimension depicts an individual's relationship with others and the interaction with the world around them. Moreover, the social dimension includes the cultures in which they were born and currently live. On the one hand, the dimension includes their relationships by stressing the importance of living with others, on the other, it also emphasizes the awareness of loneliness as a part of the social life, and the sense of ego that flows through it. The way people relate to others is through the ability to cooperate (for different kinds of companionship) or creating conflicts in order to dominate them. The paradox is that even in the latter, the person, through these processes learns to distinguish their existence from that of the other. In this way the individual learns to respect themselves as well as others.

**Personal dimension (Eigenwelt)**

The personal dimension illustrates the relationship with ourselves, usually with a specific image of our character. However, many people feel confused, losing the sense of who they really are. The personal dimension focuses on the experiences, memories, events, abilities as well as the future expectations somebody has from their own self. Usually people believe that they control their lives according to their characteristics. However, the uncontrolled situations of life bring anxiety and recall the uncertainty that existence holds. Paradoxically, these situations help to deepen awareness of the personal dimension. The person has to learn how to use their freedom and take responsibility for their decisions. This is the only way for someone to feel they take back control of their life. According to Van Deurzen, (2009), there is no reason to take responsibility for everything. The freedom to do so is still there, but people are not responsible for everything that happens. On the other hand, when taking responsibility for things they are responsible for, they help themselves to mature and strengthen. By accepting our vulnerability, the individual learns to accept that they are human. Therefore, this means that even if they cannot control everything, an individual can transform every experience into another lesson of responsibility for choosing to move forward, stay behind, standing by or making another choice.

**Spiritual dimension (Uberwelt)**

In the spiritual dimension the individual is related to the unknown and thus creates the sense of an ideal world and a personal system of values. Within this dimension, the person finds meaning and purpose through reflection and inner dialogue. The spiritual dimension includes one person's worldview, unique ideas, values and beliefs. This value system gives to the person a sense of what is right and wrong and allows them to achieve well-being. For some people the spiritual dimension is shaped by a spiritual system like religion, while others create their own values based on what they believe is worth living or dying for. The contradictions that must be dealt with in this dimension are related to the tension between purpose and absurdity as well as between hope and despair. Hence, it's a tendency of the individual to deal with possible emptiness (Van Deurzen, 2009).

**2.3.10 The harsh reality of crisis as an existential opportunity**

For Van Deurzen (2009) the theory of dimensions (worlds) of existence can help both the psychotherapist but also the client not only to formulate a therapeutic plan but to also understand their own self as someone who experiences tensions. Living in the physical dimension a person challenges physical qualities like birth and death, sensations, the body, actions, environmental factors and limitations, which give us the possibility of a full and rich life. On the other hand, the social dimension challenges our relationships. It is the struggle between acceptance and rejection, aiming to understand others as well as to be understood. The personal dimension, challenges personal strengths and weaknesses, thoughts, memories, and experience and formulate an identity with the givens of existence. In this way, people become stronger, and ready to face and cope with difficulties. Finally, the spiritual dimension refers to their own beliefs, ethics, values, and other spiritual qualities which help them to transcend the physical and to find spiritual meaning. Of course, in each of the worlds, there are possible limitations and natural losses. For example, in the physical world, the individual has to cope with constant fears. In the social world, somebody could be bullied. In the personal world, an individual could become a narcissist, or self-destructive and in the spiritual, somebody could become a fanatic. Those losses are not irreversible though.

According to Van Deurzen (2009) the theory of four dimensions, can help us understand ourselves more by questioning and searching within. Difficult periods are a great opportunity to wonder about several philosophical or life issues like how people manage their physical space, how they relate to other people, how they define themselves, what their spiritual values are. The hidden quality behind all those questions are the freedom of choice. People become what they choose to become, even if sometimes they feel that it was not their choice. Each individual can use freedom responsibly in order to change their life for the better. Any change needs effort, stamina and courage to survive the tensions, paradoxes and inner conflicts that create anxiety.

**2.3.11 Anxiety, existential anxiety and their relation to crisis**

The definition of anxiety is multidimensional. First, a person cannot but accept that anxiety is a fundamental and a primordial defence mechanism (May 1950). It activates the body to take care of itself in a situation of potential threat. In other words, it can also describe the dichotomy between the body and the mind (May 1950). Similarly, existential anxiety could always be present, reminding us or making us reflect on our human essence and nature. I

remember attending an inspirational seminar by Van Deurzen in Athens, Greece where she stated that "we die because we were born, so to live is to be anxious". For me that was an incredible description of what existential anxiety is. It is deeper and it is there, to keep us company in life. Things can change at any time, independently of where we are and where we live. We may be lucky in life (or in moments of life), we may not and there is no why to this - it is part of the absurd (Camus, 1955). On the other hand, even if we cannot change physical limitations like for example the weather, we can contribute and use our freedom to challenge the difficulties which are presented to us. Sometimes crisis is only the stimulus that we need to wake us and unlock previously hidden opportunities.

Rollo May (1986) challenges the popular idea that mental health is living without anxiety. Instead, he believed that anxiety is essential to relieve stagnation by creating new ideas and frameworks. In periods of socio-economic crises, there are always some people who use their anxieties as opportunities to create and change their lives and lives of others (Simiti, 2017). I, as a person and psychotherapist, am always inspired by that stance. Even if I work more hours in comparison with the past, I always try to work on new projects and ideas that keeps my enthusiasm and meaning to go on. But this is me, and my personal way. People have (or do not have) their own ways to create meanings according to their self-esteem, experiences, skills, and many other factors. For this reason, the Greek crisis is not only economical but also social and somehow collectively personal. According to Nietzsche (1998) people are terrified by the idea of being terrified and the mass media and political propaganda play their role in this.

Tillich (1952) published his work entitled "The Courage to Be", where he explored several meanings and types of anxiety. According to his work, the first type is the anxiety of fate and death, which is universal and relates to the recognition of mortality. The second type is the anxiety of guilt and condemnation, describing an individual's moral being and questioning what they have made for themselves and others. The third type is the anxiety of meaningless and emptiness. Humans tend to feel anxious when they have no place or purpose in their world. This anxiety is also connected with the absence of spirituality. Tillich (1952) claimed that people can find their meaning and purpose through the power of being. In other words, becoming more aware of the power of their existence is enough to make them engage with life and create meanings. Therefore, Tillich's (1952) ultimate concerns are similar to those challenged above by Yalom (1980). Yalom was inspired by the work of Tillich, integrating his theories into his existential practice. Tillich's (1952) notion that the more negativity we can take into ourselves the stronger we are is resonant with Nietzsche's (1988, as cited in Nietzsche,

1998 p. 5) "what does not kill me makes me stronger". As a counselling psychologist, I work with a lot of clients, who try to experience crisis as an existential opportunity to go further in life.

Frankl (1984) claimed that life is meaningful under any circumstances Frankl noticed that meaning could be found by giving and creating, receiving and perceiving, and by people's attitude on facing the adversities and paradoxes. He wrote that they are always free, even if not ideally free from all conditions, but free to choose among many different choices. The acceptance of physical limitations (such as socio-economic events, health issues and other difficulties), in addition to humans' ability to create meanings can create a variety of choices.

According to Van Deurzen (2010), there is a type of anxiety which is much more than simple stress. It is often called existential anxiety and it is supposed that humans cannot live without this essential given of existence. Yalom (1980) claimed that existential anxiety is an outcome of being confronted with the four givens of existence: death, meaninglessness, freedom (and its responsibility) and existential isolation. Existential anxiety directs humans towards the fundamental notions of freedom and responsibility. Kierkegaard (1980) described anxiety as the dizziness of freedom, but he argued that it is not the enemy and it isn't something that humans ought to get rid of. Kierkegaard noted that when a person learns how to be informed of their choice, self-awareness and responsibility they will be able to celebrate their own true being and freedom. For Kierkegaard, existential anxiety can be a transformational experience, a chance for someone to live better by discovering and accepting the true notion of human nature. Anxiety arises from humans' strivings to survive. For Kierkegaard (1980) anxiety is freedom's possibility because it is not only necessary to survive but also beneficial as it helps people to realize consciously our capabilities, and freedom to make decisions.

**2.3.12 Values**

According to Yalom (1980) values are born as a result of a sense of meaning. In other words, once a sense of meaning is developed in life, it usually gives birth to a system of values. An anthropological perspective of what a value is, described by Yalom (1980) as a conception of an individual or characteristic of a group of the "desirable" which influences the selection from available means and ends of actions. Hence, values help people to behave under a hierarchical manner. While they approve something, they may have to disapprove something else. From a psychological perspective, Higgins (2015) argued that values are formulated from the tendency of a person to approach the (hedonic) pleasure and avoid pain. However, he

concluded that this viewpoint alone is insufficient for three major reasons. What people find desirable (hedonic), are not restricted to experiences of pleasure and pain. Secondly, the hedonic viewpoint provides limited understanding of where the values come from. Thirdly, the hedonic viewpoint does not provide enough insights concerning the issues of gaining something (growth) versus losing something else (safety).

At this point, it would be useful to put the concern of social influence into discussion. According to Yalom (1980), values do connect individuals into groups. Sometimes, people indeed have similar sharing values that bring them closer. In some other cases individuals formulate their values according to their desire of belonging to a group of certain characteristics. In both cases, the shared values are constituted by a deeper search for personal meaning. However, values add an element of predictability to social life (Yalom, 1980). According to Van Deurzen (2002) existential psychotherapy encourages the individual to look dialectically at their own values in order to understand how and why they are chosen. This process will help the individual to define more clearly and decide which values will characterise their life, and what possibilities they bring for them. Moreover, Van Deurzen (2010), claimed that while a person wants a permanent moral code or a common system of values, they know that there is no such thing and they are free to create their own while they follow it responsibly.

In this particular study I have given particular weight to values. The reason is mainly because I wanted to identify people's tendencies to choose one thing over something else. Thinking deeper, values are choices that are of course determined by a particular responsibility towards oneself and society. According to Rogers (2004), an infant chooses some things and experiences while ending up rejecting others. This is supposed to be because eventually what they choose feels that they are enhancing or upgrading their body. According to Frankl (1984), there are different categories of values. He calls creative values those that are realized through creative action, while he calls experiential values those that are realized through the receptivity and acquaintance of the human being with the world around them.

For example, in order to form deeper values for nature one needs to have an experiential image of it. Frankl (1984), however, also spoke of a third category of values that relates to one's reactions to the limitations of one's ability. It is where the highest values are born with respect to human destiny, which often determine the way people perceive the everyday, the courage they manifest within themselves and the dignity they display. These values are called stance values. According to Frankl (1984), so-called objective values are expressed in the form of daily requirements that the individual processes as tasks. As a result, many tasks are never

made visible by the individual as they restrict them by treating them as responsibilities. Many times, the fact that a person has a duty has enormous psychological and psychotherapeutic value. Often the task becomes a guide to overcoming objective difficulties or subjective problems. As a result, a person understands that values often give purpose and meaning. According to Frankl (1984), existential analysis teaches people to view life as a mission. The more space a person occupies in the life of a quality work project, the more important their life will be for them. So, having such a great task makes the person irreplaceable and unique. Frankl argued that values create identity, and that one should not strive to find one's identity directly. He himself emphasized the fact that values can not only be considered a form of expression, but instead help people to be beyond themselves by emphasizing that as a part of society but also of nature, human values are never just that.

Therefore, Frankl directly links values to the purpose, meaning and feeling of creation. In essence, it gives the dimension of the values that exist to give humanity a sense of direction and creativity. According to Georganda (2021) Frankl's logotherapy approach takes into account human longing for meaning, not only to release the internal tension that will satisfy the need to respond to social pressure but also to lead to something "more than", replacing the nihilistic notion that we are "nothing" but a sophisticated animal or product of chance. After all, Sartre (1943, as cited in Georganda 2021) claimed that humans are nothing at all and that later they will do what they do for themselves. We could say that in Frankl's mind, what they will do for themselves will be shaped by meaning-making.

I personally agree with Frankl's (1984) view that places particular emphasis on personal responsibility in the so-called objective values. Values should be chosen with conscience and clarity as they carry their own responsibility. Some would argue that objective values are the result of a strong influence on the social environment, and therefore include the element of randomness of the point of history and the place where one is born. My point is that nothing can overcome individual judgment, wisdom and choice. We have seen in history many people serving their own values even if they went against the values that many apparently had. Values, therefore, define individuality, uniqueness and celebrate the individual choice, freedom and responsibility that each person has to place meaning and purpose in their lives. In this study, people share as many shared values as they mention values that differentiate them.

In ethics, values indicate the degree of importance of a thing or action in order to determine what is the best way of life (regulatory ethics) or to describe the importance of different things. Value systems are misleading and normative beliefs that influence a person's moral behavior or form the basis of one's beliefs and intentions. Usually there are basic values

and secondary values. The secondary ones are also the ones that are formed while the basic ones tend to stay more stable. In addition, values beyond preferences can also reflect a sense of right and wrong with what this entails. Values usually influence behavior and aesthetics in life. Many philosophers like him have spoken of moral values, dogmatic (e.g. religious), ideological and social (e.g. in politics) and aesthetic values (e.g. in art), but in my opinion despite their social origins they also rely on the human power of choice and the exploitation of inherent freedom.

William and Brown (2009) noted that Aristotle in 'Nichomachean Ethics' raises the question of the course of timeless and modern values through the question of the interest of money. He wonders if one or the other "money" is in the best interest of people for the purpose of what could be called survival or salvation through the conquest of the good. Our appreciation and practical attitude towards the interest of money is, according to Aristotle, what is called ethics. In addition, Aristotle also examines the nature of the good itself as it determines one's awareness of one's being and existence. For example, the lion is not concerned about whether it would be better to stop eating animals and start eating fish or fruit. But to people, their choices and attitude to them introduce the question of their existential position and course in the world.

## 2.3.13 Meaning in Life

There is certainly nothing more complex than asking about meaning in life. Such a question is, of course, difficult to answer in an objective light. Such questions need answers that arise through philosophy, transcendental sense, and also the moral qualities of life. According to Viktor Frankl (1984), finding meaning in life comes both from goal setting and from accepting responsibility for ourselves and others. Frankl claimed that by having an answer to each of our choices or to every "why" we can then handle all the "hows" of life. This way we can experience freedom by knowing the motives that motivate us to act, thus making a better world. Frankl himself, having survived the Holocaust, wondered about the search for meaning in a time of war, where apathy towards the basic quality of existence, that is, human life itself, was prevalent. He says, then, that meaning comes from three basic sources, work with purpose, love and courage to tackle difficulties. According to him, these were the main sources that incorporated the internal existence of prisoners who experienced very severe restrictions, but remained alive. According to Frankl (1984), love can go far beyond a loved one. Thus, one can experience the deeper meaning of one's spiritual being and one's inner self.

So, whether present or even alive remains important. In this way he describes his feelings for his wife who was killed in the camps but he continued to make sense of it.

In addition, Frankl (1984) believed a great deal in the use of a sense of humour. Even a light moment of a few seconds could stand above any difficult moment. Frankl's (1984) development of humour was a quality that drove him to learn the art of learning to live. He emphasizes that you can apply this art even in the camps that constituted for him a maximum restriction on the exercise of freedom. However, the experience of internal freedom is a different phenomenon. Spiritual freedom and independence of mind can continue to exist even in the most restrictive conditions and often exacerbated by physical stress. Frankl (1984) realized through his experiences that the last thing they can take away from you is the attitude of your life, to be able to choose your own way of feeling and thinking. Throughout my education in existential psychotherapy, but also as I reached adulthood and my experiences became more and more difficult, I found out what Frankl (1984) ultimately wanted to say. The fact that if there is finally meaning in life then it must continue to exist even in pain and difficulty. Pain is an integral part of human life and destiny from birth to death. Without pain, then, life cannot be complete, because that is the nature of it. Consequently, he believed that what can help a person survive is a strong future goal. This is the goal that will make sense to them. Therefore, there are no objective answers to the questions about meaning. The course of every human being and their destiny is unique, yet it is this that makes the very existence of humans unique and ultimately meaningful.

Frankl (1984), like Camus (1955), believed that sometimes people must accept their fate and find the courage to withstand their own rock, as in the legend of Sisyphus. However, internal freedom, although it seems to diminish, is actually there because acceptance and patience serve a purpose. The one they set themselves, or simply the purpose of their existence. According to Frankl (1984), life itself is a camp that torments the soul so that it can be opened and exposed in the depths. In the depths of this they will discover themselves and increase their chances of becoming something above them. At this point it would be good to note that meaning not only varies from person to person but can also vary within the individual depending on their purpose at different stages of life. Also, the intensity of the purpose cannot or should not be the same for everyone. However, Frankl (1984) believed that a strong purpose gives more meaning to the difficult times of life. Frankl's (1984) views are useful in this study as Greek citizens are suddenly confronted with the violence of poverty, the violent call to revise or establish their meanings, the uncertainty of the next day, and the challenge of values and attitudes to their life.       This is especially difficult for the younger generation, some of

whom have not been able to develop skills, or organize a plan. Frankl's (1984) views, however, come to the conclusion that these skills and victories of the challenges are gained only through experience, not theoretical teaching, and this is of course an attitude to life. This change in attitude as other prisoners (if you allow me the comparison) was called upon and Greek citizens were called upon to survive. For this to happen, hope, positivity and openness must start from within, not as a result of events or constraints that cause extrinsic factors. Therein lies freedom, and the duty we have to use it for our own good. In summary, people have no obligation to find a universal answer to meaning. However. they have the right, and also the duty, to take responsibility for their freedom and to use it to achieve their goals. To achieve this requires a purpose and a resolution to be implemented, without leaving it to fate and opportunity.

## 2.3.14 Meaning in western societies

According to Vos (2018) there are many myths that give a capitalist perspective to the term 'meaning'. Vos (2018) claimed that the best way to speak about meaning is as an adjective, describing our experience of how we live life. Living a meaningful life does not necessarily mean having a religious faith or finding the ultimate spiritual meaning, although some would certainly describe it that way, and it might be that way for them. But many times meaning is hidden in the flow of everyday life even if we do not know it. Vos (2017) also reported that we begin to wonder about the meaning of life when it is blocked by processes that make us feel insecure, such as losing a job, losing a salary, or other losses. This does not mean that meaning is intertwined with success or happiness, but sometimes they do co-exist. The author explained that there are people who have associated their professional success with meaning and as such every loss that occurs in their work is experienced as a personal failure that shakes the sense of meaning in their lives while ignoring meanings that may arise from connecting with family or nature.

Meaning is a well-defined psychological term, commonly accepted by the scientific community the same as the term depression or the term extroversion are. According to the study of meaning, the term is associated with values, motivation, self-worth, our ability to set goals, and cope with life's challenges, as well as the ability to perceive our place in the world (Vos, 2018). By the term motivation we mean the nature of man to move, to seek a general direction without necessarily having to rediscover the wheel at every step. People feel stable and secure if they know where they are going. Values describe what is important for each

person to feel, that their goals make sense or are worth fighting for. One value is, for example, altruism or another is respect for the freedom of the others.

Self-worth refers to one's sense of worth in order to pursue one's own values, without necessarily having to share the values of others if they do not fit into one's own system. Goal regulation is an integral part of meaning in everyday life, as through it an individual learns what is important to them and how they can achieve it. Of course, in addition to goal setting, it also need commitment to achieve these goals, a term that in my opinion is also associated with self-worth, that is, if a person believes they deserve it, they must commit themselves to achieve their goal and grow. Finally, to understand what their place in the world is, has to do with the awareness and understanding of where they are, the conditions that prevail in that place, the limitations and the possibilities, so that they know how and in what way to compete with others.

I would like to note here that limitations do not necessarily deprive people of the sense and manifestation of their freedom. People are inherently free to do as they please even within limitations, but as they become wiser they act with self-care in mind, accepting the need for courage, faith in procedures, and often patience and wisdom to recognize when the time is right to act. Commitment to goals is the key to achieving them. It is also human to lose and find courage, to be connected and disconnected from meanings, but if a person has commitment as a guide they will approach what they seek more and more. According to Vos (2020) people live with limitations which means that they will face anxiety and other physical and psychological difficulties, but this is a given. The successful combination of the above six characteristics contributes to meaning and leads to living a meaningful life. As Vos (2020) argues, it is very important to turn to the terminology of systematic research in order to avoid the myths heard about what the meaning of life is.

According to Vos (2020), capitalism can be defined as the imagination and symbols of an economic system that operates in such a way that individuals seek to increase or maximize the material goods they possess for the benefit of their own prosperity by using or increasing their capital in an ideally and fantastically free and competitive environment. Vos (2020) argued that these symbols of capitalism say more about the meanings that the people of Western societies construct during their lifetime than about the objectivity of economic events. People seem to think that they have the freedom to live their lives the way they want in the capitalist system while blaming themselves and their environment when they do not, and this ultimately seems to affect whether and how they feel satisfied with their lives. As Vos (2021) said there are no neutral economics, all economic theories and economic conditions describe or influence meanings. As I have already mentioned, my purpose in this study is not to criticize how the

economy could have worked better (I do not know how to do that, anyway!), but to understand how the economy of the crisis can affect people's ability to live a meaningful life.

For better or worse, Greece is a country that implements the economic capitalist policy of the western world and this is something that should be kept in mind as to whether and how it affects the individual's psychology. Capitalist logic certainly affects people's existential concerns, as many times the financially weak feel existentially inferior to others, which affects their sense of self-worth, and then the way they commit themselves to achieving their goals. It seems that everything is a chain. Vos (2020) argues that philosophers and economists are wrong to question whether, for example, capitalism, communism, or anarchy are the right models for all people. The real question is what the socio-economic conditions are, and at what point in history are they applied and by whom.

## 2.3.15 The four historical cultural stages of meaning

According to Vos (2018), how a person thinks and talks about meaning reflects not only their own experiences but the culture and point in history they live in. Many people think that people have had similar questions about meaning in life at all times, which does not seem to be the case as meaning is often a product of culture, time and place. Below are four socio-historical perspectives (teleological, sceptical, functional and phenomenological meanings) that will help to better understand this view but also to connect it with the phenomenological meanings of this study.

### Teleological meanings

The term teleology relates to or involves the explanation of phenomena in terms of the purpose they serve rather than of the cause by which they arise. For example, philosophers in ancient Greece created semantic content according to which their fellow citizens found purpose, within a relevance of meanings that corresponded to a collective purpose. So individual meanings did not have much significance or were interpreted within a common purpose, social or natural order. This system of meanings seems to have given meaning to the individuals themselves. It was a time when it seems that it was not the responsibility of the individual to create or seek meanings, but the work of scholars, philosophers, priests and nobles. This reflected the oligarchy system where the few defined the lives of others. It seems that the teleological perspective was very (and remains very) popular, since even now there are many books with references to ancient Greek philosophers that target the general public with

generalized meanings. Today's philosophers continue to defend the philosophy of Plato or Aristotle as a guide to their daily lives, even if they do not explicitly name their philosophy. For example, a book or a study may contain central philosophies of that time, but they are not attributed to their author because over the centuries they have become an integral part of the logic with which people live their lives.

Here Vos (2018) recognized an interesting problem. Many people do not get into the process of creating or searching for their own meanings because they follow the teleological perspective, which says there will always be something that serves a common purpose. Therefore in times of difficulty or financial limitations they do not feel happy because they try to achieve a purpose created by others, and due to limitations or crises it cannot be achieved. This is a problem because they will always feel that they have not achieved the purpose that society wants from them, and this can create feelings of depression, anxiety and a low sense of self-worth. This is a difficulty that manifests itself quite a lot in therapists who work with a focus on meaning in life.

**Sceptical meanings**

The term skepticism in meaning is associated with a trend in philosophy that deals mainly with knowledge, and challenges fidelity and correctness, considering that people are partially incapable of acquiring valid and correct knowledge because they become an unconscious victim of their senses. Skeptical meanings are comparable to the flat earth theory, in the sense that their followers challenge any knowledge, demanding clarity in definitions, consistency in knowledge, and adequacy of evidence. Examples of skepticism are philosophical, theological, scientific, social and existential. Scepticism can be either reductionist or non-reductionist. Vos (2018) states that there are people who will wonder how we can know what is more and what is less meaningful in life and of course they will not be covered by the teleological perspective.

**Functional meanings**

Skepticism did not replace teleology (actually they co-existed in some periods). Some people seem to experience a hybrid way of meaning where meanings are called functional meanings. According to Vos (2018), these are meanings that can usually be bought, and offer immediate happiness and temporary fulfillment, but at the same time they create a feeling of hunger for consumption, a feeling that demands "even more" and therefore this can become addictive. This way gives a sense of control over life, a stimulus from a sense of competition,

but also guilt (when you cannot have what you want), which serves the capitalist system. Consequently, in the long run, a vicious circle can be created that leads to a sense of "meaninglessness" (Frankl, 2010, as cited in Vos, 2018). These meanings are commonly found in Western societies and could be described as a modern version of teleology, a culture obsessed with feelings of joy and pleasure that believes everything can be replaced, thus giving the sense of control mentioned above.

**Phenomenological meanings**

Phenomenology is a philosophical movement which is based on the investigation of phenomena, that is, of things that are consciously perceived through the senses and not on the existence of anything "per se". Phenomenology is not a single movement. Husserl's (2012) phenomenology, for example, has had positivist influences, arguing that in order to understand the nature of things people must turn their attention to the things themselves or rather to their true essence. Husserl (2012) argued that in a process of continuous reduction all pre-existing theories, knowledge and experiences are removed, and confidence in the way in which they appear is finally removed. Thus through the distancing of the thinker (the process which is called epoche), from the scientifically accepted as well as from the physical attitude, an attitude of reflection and doubt is created. Heidegger (1979), on the other hand, argued that what is needed is not to understand a phenomenon but the way we understand it. Phenomenology contains an attitude of skepticism through doubt, but also an emphasis on personal experience, which, however, requires constant reflection.

As understood from the above examples, there are several ways to approach meaning, with some of them combining perspectives, such as phenomenology that combines skepticism with personal experience, even if it has metaphysical implications. Phenomenological meanings are therefore sufficient experiential experiences that make sense for the one who experiences them, regardless of whether they meet the requirements of a higher purpose that will affect the future (teleological meanings) or whether they offer a direct sense of immediate satisfaction (functional meanings).

In this study I expected to encounter meanings from different perspectives. However, my role as a researcher and existential psychologist is to try to provide space for people to express exactly what they want without being criticized or guided by me. So my attitude based on the above is phenomenological, as I tried to understand the phenomena through the experiences of others while I interpreted them naturally through my own thinking (double hermeneutics). One question that is usually asked is whether the meanings are misinterpreted

when they pass through the prism of the listener or the researcher. As a psychologist and through double hermeneutics I have learned to attribute strong self-reflection and reflexivity to the interpretation of what I hear from others. For example, the participants always think about whether what I understand from their words reflects their own experiences or whether it is interpreted by me based on my own experiential experiences. The self-distance that researchers try to apply to do this very important self-reflection is called phenomenological bracketing. Its goal is not to isolate their thinking as researchers (or even as practitioners) but in how it is expressed and if it is characterized by clarity and transparency. I will talk about interpretive phenomenology at the level of a research method in the methodology section. Here I have chosen to summarize the phenomenological way of thinking that is associated with existentialism (since according to existentialism, you live life from within rather than as a non-observer) and the meanings presenting the different perspectives historically, in order to understand it as much as possible.

It would be a pleasure if at the end of the data collection process people learn more about themselves and if clinical readers, researchers or not, enrich their thinking with reflective intuition.


## 2.3.16 Work and meaning

Work plays an important role in today's life, and therefore we can no longer imagine a daily life without work because of the several concepts associated with it. According to Baumeister (1991), work is not a process that is directly rewarded with some physical pleasure but is often guided by internal discipline or external motivation. This means that the mind or body may not be inwardly inclined to work but accept it as necessary. Again, this means that for some reason there is an internal compliance or otherwise an active attitude towards work, as no one can force anyone to get out of bed and work if they refuse. So working for the individual means to push themselves to do things that many times in reality they may not want. This does not mean, of course, that a person does not necessarily love their job. Some may love their job while others not, but satisfaction is something that comes later and not every time an achievement is achieved. According to Baumeister (1991), work is not like a song or a movie on television that can provide immediate pleasure. Work is a process and it can make sense by creating or achieving goals and finding purpose. This is often the purpose that marks the process. For other people, the purpose may be simply to pay for survival or financing of pleasant processes for the individual (which may be hidden there). However, there are people

who find meaning through the very content of their work. In short, the need for work is motivated by a natural motivation not for the work itself, but necessarily for the fact that it satisfies the needs for survival, enjoyment, safety and comfort.     Of course, in different cultures (such as the western ones) we see not only the need for processes to be rewarded, but also the meaning through the work itself, the process of work or recognition by colleagues or even society itself. Of course, in a society that can exhaust workers, people resist work, and then society is looking for ways to bring people back to work for its well-being. In this situation meanings take on a different tone depending on the content, circumstances and the person they are targeting. For example, a person who finds meaning in the content of his work may stop feeling the same if he is exhausted. On the contrary, a person who does not find meaning in their work may begin to find it if they are given respect from their work environment. The combinations that can be made of working and signifying factors are truly infinite, yet it is observed in everyday life that one's values, attitudes and self-esteem are usually part of this multifactorial equation (Baumeister, 1991).

**The three meanings of work**

According to Baumeister (1991), there can be no single answer to the role of work in the meaning of life. Working as mentioned above may not make the same sense for everyone. According to a study by Bellah et al. (1985, as cited in Baumeister, 1991), in American society three categories of meaning can be distinguished. These categories are the work as job, as calling and as a career. Working as a job refers to the purpose of been paid without personal enjoyment or satisfaction. Working as a calling describes a job that is done with a sense of community responsibility, personal commitment, duty or destiny. Working as a career is usually motivated by the desire for success and recognition. Of course, the authors of the study explain that these three categories are not exclusive. Some people combine their elements. However, the basics of these categories show the different way one perceives one's work in relation to the meanings it offers in their life.

**Work as a job**

People who experience their work as a job usually do not perceive it as the most important means of seeking or giving meaning. Working for them is a tool to have an income that will give them the opportunity to find meaning through something else. This view is also most common in people with less education (Veroff et al., 1981, as cited in Baumeister, 1991). Correspondingly, it is common for people who, through their work, want to achieve academic

goals. For example, one can work in a cafeteria to finance their master's or doctorate. The fact that one holds a job can offer self-esteem, especially in a society afflicted by unemployment or low wages (Rubin, 1976, as cited in Baumeister, 1991). In addition, a stable occupation can give even more self-worth to people who have a family regardless of the nature of the job. Specifically for men, steady work confirms masculinity through the fact that a man can take care of his family while otherwise failing. Remember what was mentioned earlier about suicides in Greece for people who lost their jobs over the age of 55. In addition, many times self-worth is also affected by the amount of money one earns.

**Work as a career**

According to Baumeister (1991), the definition of a career is usually identified with the success, achievement and status of the profession. The work as a career is not necessarily combined with a love for the profession, the production or the services it provides, but with feedback to oneself as a result of one's work. For the careerist, work is a means of creating, defining, proving and cheering oneself. Working as a career is a sign of modern societies. Careers are usually strongly motivated, as they are meaningful through feedback and rewards, yet even without those motivations one can remain active towards the career goal, often devoting more hours and sacrifices to eventually receive the reward they desire. Working as a career is a powerful source of meaning in life to the point where the person may not feel that they need another meaning in their life. So, some people are called workaholics because of a lack of interest in doing something other than their own work (Machlowitz, 1980, as cited in Baumeister, 1991). Self-worth and effectiveness are the points a career focuses on. The first because it gives pleasure, and the second because it empowers the first by rewarding the self or others for the self. Although a career may make sense, it does not mean that the career is an act of fulfillment. This is because the career focuses more on the goal rather than the content of the exercise as an autonomous meaning. Career focuses on defining a person's identity and value both in themselves and in society. However, a career that includes satisfying the self through the content of the work itself can add even deeper meaning.

**Work as a calling**

According to Baumeister (1991), the modern mind is not so familiar with working as a call. Calling refers to something that drives a person to engage and dedicate their life to a particular job. This call usually comes from both internal and external sources. The formal concept came from other times, when the call had a divine meaning. In other words, one might

feel that God was calling them to deal with something as a divine will. Over the years, the call has been quite linked to the task. For example, in past wars people felt that it was their duty to serve the army voluntarily even if they had no professional or other career prospects (Baumeister, 1991). Here it would be useful to note that in Greece this is still the case. Serving in the military is mandatory for all men, even if they don't want to pursue such a career. Most Greek male citizens still feel a moral obligation towards this service. So the concept of duty is still very strong in various social aspects. Calling work mainly fulfills two aspects, first the sense of satisfaction and the second the sense of value. So even if the nature of the job is frustrating at some point, there will certainly be elements that will keep the person connected to it as there is enjoyment through a deeper purpose. According to Baumeister (1991), many would think that calling work is very popular nowadays, but it is not. The reason for this is probably not because there is little in modern work that is compatible with this aesthetic. Mostly the call is combined with career stances, which is a combination quite satisfying to find meaning. There are people who believe that they have a divine gift or talent, a deeper duty, and are eventually led to careers related to health, law, scientific research and the arts.

### 2.3.17 Attitudes

Bohner (2001, as cited in Hewstone, Stroebe & Jonas, 2012) claimed that most researchers define attitudes as a summary assessment of an object. Specifically, attitudes are psychological tendencies that represent the central point of human perception and interpretation of phenomena, as individuals evaluate and direct their behavior in their interactions with their social environment. The study of attitudes was based on the cognitive processes of assessment and on the presence of an attitude object (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998, as cited in Hewstone, Stroebe & Jonas, 2012). According to the aforementioned scholars, object can be anything that a person discerns and holds in their mind. In other words, objects can be specific (e.g. a food item), a person (the country's prime minister), something abstract (the crisis), groups of people (political parties) or something inanimate (money). Also, attitudes usually contain a positive or negative tendency.

Attitudes towards social groups, especially if they are negative, are called 'prejudices', attitudes towards ourselves are usually studied in the light of 'self-esteem', and attitudes towards abstract entities (e.g. freedom of speech), commonly referred to as values (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998). At this point it is important to note that the tendency for evaluation is not subject to immediate observation and reaction to a given stimulus. However, it is based on the experience

of events which are divided into three components: logic, emotion, and behavior (Rosenberg et al., 1960). Using a similar example to Bohner (2001, as cited in Hewstone, Stroebe & Jonas, 2012), a positive attitude towards the left political party can lead to: 1) the expectation that their involvement in government will promote the financial protection of the weaker (logic) 2) the admiration for one of the politicians, for example, the leader of the party (emotion), 3) the intention to give money to the campaign (behavior). In my opinion during the crisis all three phenomena were observed in the Greek electorate, which makes the example partly real.

In addition, the perception and interpretation of social phenomena explains how one perceives and adapts their behavior to the various phenomena of their psychological and social environment. Studying attitudes is always considered very important in any attempt to bring human behavior to the social dimension. In other words, the common point of the various definitions of attitudes lies in the domain of attitudes, that is, in the context of behavior and not in behavior itself. Existential concepts such as "freedom" or "ideology", though abstract, are guided by attitude, that is, how they are perceived and interpreted by individuals.

Attitudes usually include an element of stability, as they do not change easily and tend to resist change. However, they are learnt as they are shaped by the direct or indirect environment. Therefore, their change can be explained by different theories of learning.

The primary social player in shaping attitudes is the family. For this reason, attitudes formed within the family are usually deeper rooted and resistant to change. As a therapist, I often observe the phenomenon of people working to change attitudes by following their emotions and authenticity and who consider that family attitudes do not represent them, but at the same time struggle with anxiety over the fact that they have 'betrayed' their family's values.

Another important factor in shaping trends is the mass media that use visual and acoustic means to shape public opinion on social issues. Unfortunately, as is easily understood, media often use misleading techniques to influence people without access or background to a deeper knowledge that will help them evaluate what is being presented. Mass media played and play a major role in shaping Greek society, especially when people had not yet experienced the consequences, but were listening to the theories of the various experts. The phenomenon of the far right in the political scene, for example, was introduced into the crisis through the selective propaganda of certain television stations and newspapers that presented the events and actions of the right-wing fascists through the reaction of the existing corrupt political system. So right-wing criminals came out as saviors, and saw their electoral rates go up. However, experience and social reality have finally proved to be much more powerful, as such attitudinal efforts are easily subdued through the social experience and its consequences. Of

course, it takes a long time for that to happen. In the case of Greece, it took about seven years for the phenomenon to recede.

Attitudes change as people learn to associate the object of the attitude with pleasant or unpleasant situations and consequences. This change is signaled by an interaction of effort and effortless processes, which are a function of cognitive, experiential, and inductive factors. For example, a person may have had the habit of not borrowing money. However, the need for survival as a life experience, the logic that everyone owes or borrows to survive, and the fact that they know that some members of their family can help them without having to bear the burdensome consequences of borrowing can eventually lead them to borrow. In this example the disposition of a person to act by reshaping an attitude on the basis of experience including aspects of their social environment and evaluating the lives of others.

Also worth mentioning is the question of fear in the formation of attitudes. According to Feldman and Zaller (1992), the views on the issue of fear are contradictory. On the one hand there is the view that being intimidated in any message only shapes the attitude when at the same time instructions are given to avoid danger. Otherwise fear-provoking stimuli tend to wake up defense mechanisms through already existing stances. I feel that in Greece during the crisis many social groups (such as political parties) tried to intimidate the citizens by proposing solutions at the same time that, while sounding convincing, led to a greater quagmire. For example, since the police do not provide solutions to the immigration problem, then citizens must take the law into their own hands as it served the far-right agenda. In such cases, communication was used as a means of propaganda. A communication that seemed believable, comprehensible and reliable while targeting specific social groups with fragile attitudes was based on anger and fear rather than open attitude and dialogue.

Attitudes predict behavior to the extent that the two conceptual constructions correspond to each other in their specificity and that there are similar aspects of the object of the action. For example, looking at the economic crisis in various societies with common variables (e.g. in Great Britain), similar phenomena are observed in the response of social groups (e.g. the rise of conservative isolationism and the far right). However, this example serves only to explain the aforementioned theory as further sociological analysis is needed. However, modern research in social psychology shows that there is a strong relationship between attitudes and behavior which means that both attitudes and behavior can be predicted through the study of attitudes and vice versa (Bohner, 2001, as cited in Hewstone, Stroebe & Jonas, 2012).

In conclusion, attitudes and derivative values remain in active dialogue during major social changes. Attitudes are usually easier to change and usually refer to conceptions, ideas, and behaviors that can be accepted by social groups that evaluate them as desirable. On the other hand, values are often deeply rooted in the human soul and can create in the individual conscience remorse or feelings of failure (Georgas, 1995). Tsakalos (2005), noted that according to Aristotle, morality as virtue and value contains the disposition to behave in the right way and is learned through habit and practice and not through a rational teaching. Of course, the right thing is subjective and is usually determined by the habits and environment one grows up in. Although Aristotle's ethics are a common-sense ethic based on naturalism and self-actualization, the relationship with good and happiness is a right and a choice, not an innate disposition. Similar to Kierkegaard (1980) and his existential attitude, people struggle in an irrational and meaningless world, responsible for giving meaning to their existence and living their life passionately and honestly, despite existential obstacles such as anxiety, despair, irrationality and boredom, choosing the individual attitudes and values that will lead them to this end.

## 2.4 How literature shaped my research

In this literature review I have tried to provide a comprehensive picture of the important literature available regarding my research questions and related concepts such as meaning, values, attitudes, focused on an existential perspective as evidenced by my academic interests. This effort helped me to better define my topic and to concretize my research questions as well as to establish the importance of my research object. In addition, this review helped me to identify the gaps that exist in the research literature, mainly in terms of phenomenological research concerning Greek society in the years of crisis. However, I noticed similar gaps in the global research on the phenomenological and existential perspective of meaning making and exploration in similar periods of crisis.                        During the process I tried to stay critical by pointing out consistent findings and reflective views instead of just summarizing the theories, ideas and research findings of other authors, scholars and researchers. Initially, this review helped me to understand in depth the historical and social parameters that contributed to the spread of the economic crisis in Greece. I tried to illustrate this understanding in the initial chapters in order to build a background that would help the reader to understand the conditions that Greek citizens lived through, decades before the crisis and during it. In addition, I attempted to use  my literature review (given the lack of literature in similar and comparable

research), to prepare the reader for the phenomenological way in which the findings would be analyzed and interpreted, and finally the way that research questions would be answered. For this to happen it was very important to deepen my already existing knowledge of the existential concepts related to meaning, the emotions that crises create in humans and how they affect the attitudes and values of life in a modern western society. At this point I will give an example from the review. International psychologists in recent history such as Van Deurzen (2009) and Yalom (1980) refer extensively to the crises and difficulties that create feelings of anxiety, disappointment and insecurity in people. Van Deurzen refers to social, personal, spiritual and existential dimensions of crises and their influence on finding or creating meaning, while Yalom (1980) refers to the conflicting attitude that a crisis can bring with the universal givens of existence where meaning, loss, the loneliness and freedom of the individual and ultimately the anxiety that this confrontation can bring. Similarly, both these writers and others such as Tillich (1952) or Cooper (2003) talk about the ability of the individual to turn their difficulties into existential opportunities. Courage as well as resilience and an active attitude to human life are qualities that the individual should discover both individually and socially. During the reading I did for the preparation of my literature review I found that my research has the potential to offer something new and to fill a research gap that exists in terms of psychological and phenomenological studies concerning the wider field of how people create or explore meaning during crises. I have chosen a specific age and social group, but I hope that in the future there will be other similar studies that will explore other groups both in Greek society and internationally, especially in populations that are forced to live perhaps less authentically due to social limitations. In conclusion, existentialism, and phenomenology both as philosophical movements and as fields of psychological knowledge, influenced and shaped the design of this study and the way in which its data were analyzed, giving space to the expression of opinions, ideas and meanings of young unemployed professionals. People who struggled to study and pursue scientific paths and are now called upon to find ways to live satisfying lives, either by redefining their dreams and priorities or by claiming their rights, but certainly by staying active in a changing world. Interpretation through existential and phenomenological concepts is a very important fact that the reader must understand as the phenomena of crises could be approached through various sociological, philosophical and psychological approaches. For example, it would be interesting to see similar research in the future through the perspective of psychodynamic theory (which would further analyze concepts such as the collective unconscious and the subconscious and how they affect or are affected by such a

painful phenomenon as an economic crisis) or cognitive behavioral perspective (perhaps emphasizing the dysfunctional patterns of thoughts or behaviors caused by an economic crisis).

## 2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this literature review provided the necessary background to design this study but also to analyze and interpret its findings through the phenomenological and existential perspective. First of all, this review described to the reader the social and historical context in which the Greek financial crisis was created and evolved, and then introduced them to an in-depth study of existential and phenomenological concepts as presented by philosophers, psychologists and researchers so that they could understand in depth the analysis and discussion of the findings made through the same ontological background of thought. The literature review prompted me to focus on and use interpretive phenomenological analysis as a methodology for collecting, and interpreting findings related to the meanings, attitudes, values, feelings, and ideas expressed by my research sample, young unemployed professionals who chose to live their lives in Greece and not to emigrate as did another 500,000 educated Greek citizens during the crisis. I hope this research is useful to the general public but also to psychologists who will have the curiosity or desire to hear some of the experiences of young professionals suffering in the crisis as well as to know some concepts of existential psychology associated with the phenomena of crises. Maybe this will prepare them and inspire them in their clinical practice with people living under this regime. Existential psychology and psychotherapy can offer not only relief and useful skills in crisis situations, but also wisdom that can ultimately push people to redefine their priorities, awaken them socially, and help them transform difficulties into opportunities to exercise their freedom and right to live authentically (Van Deurzen, 2009).

# Chapter 3

# Methodology

## 3.1 Methodological considerations

This part of the pilot research focuses on providing an argument and context between different research methods and methodologies. The aim of the following section is to illustrate why I chose interpretative phenomenological analysis among other qualitative methods.

Firstly, I discuss the reason I chose qualitative over quantitative methodology in terms of epistemology and then I present the epistemological and ontological assumptions between three dominant methods.

### 3.1.1 A comparison between quantitative and qualitative research

Quantitative research originated in natural and social sciences. It is mostly used to explore a hypothesis by generating numerical data that can be reduced into usable statistics. In psychology, it is used to investigate and quantify qualities like attitudes, opinions, behaviours, or other defined variables by generalising those results to a larger population group. The strength of quantitative research is that it works with structured data collection methods analysed by structured statistical analysis tools (Harper, 1989; Ball and Smith, 1992, as cited in Breakwell, 2006). Quantitative data collection is generated numerically by a variety of methodological forms such as paper surveys, online surveys, face to face interviews, online interviews, systematic face to face observations, experiments and so on.

On the other hand, qualitative research refers to verbal rather than numerical data. The researcher usually collects the data by asking questions to the participants. Some researchers though, argued that visual images can lend themselves to similar types of analysis (Harper, 1989; Ball and Smith, 1992, as cited in Breakwell, Hammond, Fife & Schaw, 2000). Observation, interviews or examination of documents (such as journals and diaries) are some of the most common ways of collecting qualitative data. Qualitative methods are becoming increasingly more and more accepted in psychology. One reason is that it is flexible to focus on human experience rather than seeking to establish generalisations   This research is one such example: being related both with different fields of psychology and existential psychotherapy, searching for human experience, qualitative methodology was the obvious choice. Thus, according to Willig (2008), the researcher will search for themes and patterns by analysing the information given verbally (e.g. via semi structured interviews).

In reality both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used to generate theories, however, according to Breakwell (2000, as cited in Breakwell, 2006) only quantitative methods can be used to verify if a hypothesis is true (by rejecting the null hypothesis). In psychotherapy and counselling related research, psychologists tend to use qualitative research in order to gain better understanding and pay attention to the very personal meanings and experience of the participants (Willig, 2008).

Qualitative research gives the researcher the opportunity to describe and present rather than predict, reaching beyond initial responses, by observing and interpreting both verbal and non-verbal communication, which is valuable during interviews and discussions (Willig, 2008). Interviews, usually work dynamically, by responding to and engaging with a certain type of active process (conversation). Of course, those strengths could also be understood as weaknesses at the same time. For example, there might be arguments around issues of validity and reliability. For this reason, qualitative research must be conducted by skilled scientists who can attempt to bracket their assumptions, be reflective and evaluative in their thinking and writing processes. Furthermore, peer-review and constructive criticism by other scientists are also important both during and after the study process. Qualitative research recognises the researcher as an important part of the process of knowledge production as well as being based on beliefs about what is legitimate scientific inquiry. Additionally, it is based on the belief that social situation (and interaction) is important because reality cannot be objective and given (Lyons, as cited in Blackwell, 2006).

What matters though is "why" I chose one instead of the other, and how I worked with the chosen approach. To provide evidence, I present two different types of qualitative methodology, comparing them under the context and nature of my research:

### 3.1.2 A comparison between grounded theory, discursive psychology and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

### 3.1.2.1 Comparison, dilemmas and method of choice

The aim of this section is to compare three qualitative methods used in mental and physical health research, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), discourse analysis and grounded theory. When I started designing this research, I studied all three of these methods to figure out which one was right for me to work with. In the following lines I will give a presentation and comparison of these quality methods and I will explain the reasons I decided on IPA, which best served both my research questions and the collection and analysis of my data and the presentation of my findings.

Before talking about methods as research tools for data collection and analysis I would like to refer to the ontology and philosophy of the three different approaches. To summarize, IPA has its roots in phenomenology which is used to examine how people create and explore meaning in their experiential experiences. Discourse analysis examines how language is used

to contribute to personal, social and political projects. Grounded theory develops explanatory 3theories through social processes which it studies in the appropriate context (Starks & Trinidad, 2009). As one can easily understand from the above brief descriptions, IPA caught my attention from the beginning as it is related to European philosophy (as well as existential psychology) and emphasizes the description of the meanings that come from the experiential experiences of the participants. However, I had to study all three methods before choosing, as among others they are all useful for a counselling psychologist and researcher.

IPA has its roots in the European philosophy of the early 20th century. It includes the detailed description and analysis of living experiences so that the researcher understands how meaning is created through embodied perception (Sokolowski, 2000; Steward & Mickunas, 1974). Sokolowski (2000) argued that phenomenological claims indicate the obvious and the necessary. Therefore we are often told things we already know, however although we may not hear anything new, knowledge remains important and enlightening, as many times knowledge can confuse us or create doubts. The same goes for philosophy and its claims. So what gives light to this knowledge is that it is expressed through the embodied experience. The phenomenological researcher is interested in personal experiences that convey the meaning and essence of experiences or events. What interests the researcher is the subjective experience as perceived and experienced by the participant. Note that subjective experience can be variable within a dynamic relationship of space and time, while people often experience both space and the sense of time differently as Einstein notes in the theory of relativity (Starks & Trinidad, 2009).

Discourse analysis was developed by linguistic studies and deals mainly with language as it is used to carry out individual, social and political projects. According to Starks & Trinidad (2009), language and words are a system of signs that have no meaning if they are not shared in a condition where people mutually understand the meanings produced (e.g. they speak the same language). Respectively, language reveals the social roles that people have and the way they want to communicate their identity with others (Chandler, 2002). According to Gee (2005) language analysis provides information about what is happening, activities, identities, relationships, policies, connections, symbols and knowledge (theory of the seven building tasks - see below). Also, discourse analysis often examines the historical context, providing information that is dynamically linked to culture, social and political practices as in Foucauldian discourse analysis (Gee, 2005).

According to Blumer (1986) grounded theory has its roots in sociology and specifically in symbolic interactionism which advocates the view that meaning is negotiable and is

understood through social processes and interactions. Social processes are complex, structured, ethical, and involve interactions that shape the meaning produced. The aim of the approach is to develop theories concerning basic social processes in the appropriate contexts in which they take part. Grounded theory examines the six 'Cs' of social processes, i.e. causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances and conditions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Knowledge in this method is usually produced by observing the behavior and practices of speech.

### 3.1.2.2 The approaches as methods

All approaches negotiate questions about meaning and understanding. However, the way of negotiation differs and determines the design of the research questions, the collection and the analysis of the data. However, the crucial point about choosing an approach as a research tool is what we want to research and how our questions will be served. As mentioned above, IPA helps the researcher to shape and ultimately answer research questions related to experiential experiences and how the meanings of people are created and explored by them. Discourse analysis serves research questions that have to do with knowledge, meaning, social identities and social goods through the use of language. Finally, grounded theory tries through research questions to ask questions and extract theories from the way social processes work and how they affect social interactions.

In terms of sampling, data collection and analysis, the above quality methods work best with interviews, focus groups or texts that can be studied (mainly in the way language is used in each social and historical context) . It usually does not require a large number of participants as even a small sample can extract tens, hundreds or even thousands of concepts. However, the specific sample number is determined by the research questions and the purpose of the research. Specifically, a typical sample in interpretive phenomenological research is 1 to 10 people who have an experiential experience of a common phenomenon and have the ability to express this experience in detail, unfolding various aspects of it. In discourse analysis, individuals' or groups' narratives with written documents or larger sample sizes are usually compared in order to understand variations in language-in-use across people and settings. In grounded theory it is difficult to determine the exact people that will be needed (usually there is a range between 10 and 60 people) as the researcher studies the phenomena through different aspects as they are interested in comparing multiple dimensions of the phenomenon in their attempt to create theories. This is why it usually adds people to its sample until it reaches a theoretical saturation that can create a sufficient theory representative of the data.

In terms of data collection methods, all three approaches can use a mix of observation, interview and text study. But due to the fact that interpretive phenomenological analysis focuses on experiential experiences and the way in which participants create their life story, interviews are preferred. However, conclusions are drawn by observing the way participants behave and give meaning to their experiences. Space and time in the case of observation is important, as it helps to understand the way in which the person experiences the experience mentally and physically and how they explore, create or connect with meaning. In discourse analysis, in addition to interviews, the researcher can use observation to draw conclusions from the way the participant uses language to achieve their goals and to express their inner world. In discourse analysis, and specifically in the Foucauldian subcategory, a historical discourse on the use of language and its purposes can be studied (e.g. a speech video or a recorded text with Hitler speaking to the people in order to persuade them to fight to achieve his goals). In grounded theory (except of course interviews) observation allows the researcher to see how social processes are influenced by the physical and social environment in which they are produced.

In terms of coding, IPA focuses on the careful study of data and its categorization into topics (and subtopics) based on common meanings revealed by the experiential experiences of different participants.

Discourse analysis, on the other hand, aims to understand how people use language in a given situation. So the coding phase in discourse analysis focuses on identifying issues and roles that arise through the use of language. For example, a discourse analysis could be conducted focusing on comparing the use of the term "patient" with the term "person" by a participant. According to Gee (2005), the analytical process is described as an attempt to identify textual evidence that shows that language achieves the seven building tasks of language. In short, the seven tasks of language refer to: 1) how a language is used to show that something is important or less important (significance), 2) what tactics a language uses to function (practices), 3) the identity it gives to the participant according to what they say or write (identities), 4) the relationship that the participant wants to have with others through the use of language (relationships), 5) the specific language that can show strength or tendency to what is right or good (politics), 6) the use of language that can connect or disconnect specific things (connections) and 7) how language favours specific points of knowledge in relation to others (sign systems and knowledge).

Grounded theory focuses on a continuous comparison of coding and data analysis methods through three stages: open coding (examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and

categorizing data), axial coding (reassembling data into groupings based on relationships and patterns within and among the categories identified in the data) and selective coding (identifying and describing the central phenomenon or core category in the data). Ideally, each interview has been coded before the next so that new information is constantly added to help extract theories.

In qualitative research, analysis is somewhat subjective in the sense that the researcher is the tool for analyzing and presenting findings. However, each method has its own techniques for supervising, recording and evaluating the research process in a way that makes the findings credible. In IPA and grounded theory the researcher engages with the analysis as they are a witness to the process and the way they interpret the findings is important. For example, in IPA the researcher engages in a "double hermeneutic" as it is their role to understand and describe the way the participant thinks and creates meaning, however the interpretation necessarily contains its own prism of thinking in how it perceives the participant's thought. But it is important in both methods that the researcher is in a continuous self-reflective process called "bracketing" to eliminate, but not ignore, their prejudices and own self-conceptions as much as possible. It is also very important that these procedures are recorded with transparency so that the final findings appear to emerge. Respectively, the researcher who works with discourse analysis lists their point of view and position in the analytical process, separates it from the participant and describes how their role as a researcher shapes the analysis so that the reader can understand it, having the analyst's perspective in their mind (Finlay, 2002).

In my study it is clear that what I was thinking about was more related to the philosophy of phenomenology and the IPA method, as I wanted to study how young unemployed professionals lived their lives in the crisis and how they created alternative meanings in it, as well as whether their attitudes and values had changed, and how. I did not emphasize the use and choice of language, and while I was interested in hearing their views and ideas about social phenomena, I did not focus on their function, nor was I interested in extracting theories from what they said. I also believe that existential psychology, the prism of which I chose to support my work in the literature, (as it approaches in depth the field of crises as painful and restrictive processes of life) is philosophically compatible with phenomenology and interpretive phenomenological analysis. In conclusion, IPA was chosen because its theory was compatible with the epistemological position of my research questions and how and what I wanted the data to show. In my research I wondered about meaning (and purposes) in life, and how attitudes and values affected their formation, but also the way people live their lives. The coding started from the detailed study of lived experiences, and the issues arose from what was common

among the participants, without meaning that what was not common was not important or worth mentioning.

## 3.2 The theory and process of interviewing

By doing interviews the researcher tries to understand the phenomena through the perspective of the participants while uncovering the meanings of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Interviews help others to convey a situation through the words of the one who experiences a phenomenon (Finlay, 2008). According to Kvale (1996) qualitative research interviews are based on the conversations of everyday life. Although interviews in qualitative research are structured and somehow controlled by the researcher, the information provided may not be objective but reflects one's views on something (Sewell, 2012). At this point we must remember that the purpose of qualitative research is not to highlight the objectivity but to interpret the relational meaningful dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee while exploring the personal views of the latter. Kvale (1996) explored different philosophical approaches in order to understand how qualitative interviews can generate knowledge. Hence, he emphasized that the resulting knowledge that comes from the interviews is related to a postmodern and phenomenological construction of knowledge. The philosophies of phenomenology, post modernism and dialectics as they arise from the works of Heidegger and Husserl over to Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and Lyotard highlight the different aspects of qualitative research interviewing and provides the appropriate framework for the different methodological choices that must be made (Kvale, 1996).

Although there is no common procedure for research interviews, an interview investigation can be outlined in seven stages: thematizing, designing the study so it addresses the research questions, the interview itself, transcribing, analysing, verification and reporting (Kvale, 1996). Specifically, during the first step of thematizing, the researcher formulates the purpose of the research and describes the concept of the topic to be investigated before the procedure of interviews starts. During the second step of designing, the researcher plans the design of the study, taking into consideration all seven stages. During the third, interviewing process, the researcher conducts the interviews with a reflective approach based on the interview plan. The fourth step is the transcription process, where the researcher transfers the oral speech into written text. In the fifth step, analyzing stage, the researcher must decide which method of analysis is appropriate according to the purpose of the study and the nature of the

interview material. During the sixth process, called verifying, the researcher ascertains the generalizability, reliability (that refers to how consistent the findings are), and validity (whether an interview study investigates what is intended to be investigated) of the interviewing process.

In the last phase of reporting, the researcher communicates the findings of the study and the methods applied in a form that is compatible to the scientific criteria, taking the ethical aspects into consideration and presenting the findings into a readable product. The consideration of ethical issues is very important and will be analyzed in a following chapter. However, we can note here that research participants should be informed about the purpose of the research and the main features of the design. Participants also need to be informed and agree on the way that their data will be treated by the researcher and any other possible risks. Furthermore, the interviewers need to pay attention to intercultural competence, that requires people to recognize and respect the diversity of the different cultural backgrounds. The interviewers need to understand that their personal beliefs and biases when forming questions, may slightly impact the outcomes of the interviews. Similarly, if the interviewer cannot realize the cultural dimensions of the interview this can lead to miscommunication and unpleasant results (mostly in semi-structured, open-ended interviews).

### 3.2.1 The interview situation

According to Kvale (1996), the research interview situation should be a conversation between 2 persons about a theme of mutual interest. The interviewee must feel confident to talk freely and the interviewer must do everything possible to create the conditions, defining and facilitating the situation in the best way. Kvale (1996) claimed that preparation is very important as it helps to ensure that you get interviews that you can actually use and data the researcher can handle. Similarly, Knox and Burkard (2009) claimed that the researcher must be prepared beforehand about the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of the interview. A clear purpose of the interview, the technique a researcher is going to use, as well as the briefing and debriefing process are important to be considered. During the process, the researcher uses a questions guide with or without detailed questions. The more spontaneous the structure of the interview, the livelier answers will be. In semi-structured interviewing (the method that I used in this research) the researcher allows new ideas to be brought up during the interview. The interviewees have the opportunity to express opinions extensively and ask questions to the interviewer during the interview in order to give more useful (or 'to the point') information (Willig, 2008). However, the structured part of the semi-structured interviews gives the

interviewers reliable and comparable data. Semi structured interviews are between the structured and the unstructured ones. The unstructured are considered more informal and the structured is a type of interview that is completely planned which means that every interviewee gets the same interview questions. The advantage of semi-structured interviews in phenomenological research is their open-ended nature (Kvale, 1996). In most cases, the interviewer will ask questions that do not lead to 'yes' or 'no' answers, instead the interviewee (if the question is correctly stated) has the opportunity to present and analyze their views as much as they want on a theme. For this reason, in semi-structured interviewing the researcher tries to avoid asking multiple questions or dichotomous or scaled questions (Finlay, 2008).

**3.2.2 Quality of the interview and data**

According to Kvale (1996) there are six criteria that help the researcher to understand if there is the expected quality in their interviews. In this research I tried to work with these criteria in mind. According to the first criterion, the shorter the interviewer's questions and the longer the interviewer's answers the better. The second criterion concerns the fact that the ideal interview is to a large extent interpreted throughout the interview. Similarly, the third criterion is that of self-communicating, in other words, that the story of the interviewee is contained in itself, and hardly requires much extra descriptions and explanations. According to Kvale (1996) the fourth criterion concerns the extent of spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant answers from the interviewee. Additionally, the interviewer attempts to verify their interpretations of the participant answer's in the course of the interview, and that is the fifth criterion. Finally, the sixth is the degree to which the interviewer follows up and clarifies the meanings of the relevant aspects of answers.

Additionally, part of the quality of the data is the transcription process (see a sample at Appendix 3) from speech to text. It is especially important when someone types the interview to listen again and again to the tone of voice, the pauses and other details. In this research, although the transcription was done with the help of a professional, I was very careful in choosing both my assistant (a graduate of humanities science, with experience in research and working in a university research center), and in the detailed instructions I had given for the procedure (e.g. to pay attention and record punctuation, pauses, phenomena like laughter or crying, tone of voice etc.) to be sure that my knowledge coincided with her own. However, I invested a lot of time to make sure that the transcriptions were done the way I wanted as I checked them several times and corrected omissions and errors.

### 3.2.3 Preparation of the interviewing questions

In the following paragraphs I will refer to the preparation of the interview and the creation and selection of questions. According to Smith et al. (2009), the draft of the questions should include six to ten open-ended questions which should occupy the participant for forty-five (45) to ninety (90) minutes of dialogue depending of course on the subject. It is common for the draft to always include more questions that will be updated as needed in real life (which is why I did a pilot study). In my own study I started with a draft of ten questions and ended up with eight sub-questions (see Appendix 2). In some cases, and depending on the flow of the discussion, I had to adjust the order or change the wording of the questions to make it easier for the participant to understand. Smith et al. (2009) give some tips for conducting the interviews that I had in mind both in creating the queries and during the process. This advice was:

1) The researcher does not need to ask the research questions directly. They should create a plan of questions in such a way as to answer the research questions through it. To create this plan the researcher starts with questions concerning the wide field of research and the sample they have chosen. For example, the introductory question in my study was about the general experience of what it is like to live in Greece while in a financial crisis and I gradually began to build a background with questions that would lead the discussion to explore and/or create meanings.

2) The researcher should identify the individual areas of research they want to cover. For example, in my study I wanted to cover areas related to exploring and creating meaning in the financial crisis, about whether the financial crisis affects the life attitudes and deeper values of the participant. A separate area is the investigation of the positive effects of the crisis on the lives of the participants.

3) The researcher should find a logical order to ask the questions concerning these areas. This sequence is sometimes updated based on the flow of the discussion. However, in my study I found a logical sequence from the general to the specific with a gradual build which passed the pilot study test and was followed along the way.

4) The researcher should think about how to express the questions. Sometimes it may be helpful to ask something more open or abstract, while other times it may be necessary to ask something more specific. However, it is something that must be taken into account.

5) Finally, Smith et al., (2009) suggest discussing this interview plan with someone else, supervisors or research associates even in the form of a draft interview in order to find the right questions and the right way to conduct the interview. This process is very useful because it gives space for re-drafting and experimentation. The purpose of the interview is to make the participant feel safe in order to express their personal world. In this study I worked hard with my supervisors to create and finalize the questions, their order, but also how they should be expressed to the participant. Some small changes were made after the end of the pilot study (for example, a question was added regarding the contribution of psychotherapy to self-development and the management of emotions related to the crisis).

In addition to these principles I followed other advice from the above authors, such as the fact that I had to become familiar with the process so that I have confidence in order for the participant to feel safe to trust me, to express empathy, to be open to listen (even opinions that may not express me), to address them calmly and firmly, to let them complete the questions without interrupting them and to ask parallel questions in between, but to encourage them when they need to expand the answers, to double check when I am not sure I understand what they want to express. According to Smith et al. (2009), semi-structured interviews are a dynamic process that ideally should follow a rhythm, which of course is complex as the researcher must remain reflective and act as a facilitator who leads the discussion gradually from the general to the specific, from the descriptive to the affective, from the superficial to the disclosing . As the interview progresses, the participant finds their own voice so the researcher does not have to constantly use phrases such as "could you tell me more about that?" as now the relationship between researcher and participant is the one that directs the dynamics.

## 3.2.4 Main methodological aspects of analysis

According to Willig (2008) participants describe their lived world during the interview, discovering new relationships during the interview and see new meaning in what they see and do. The interviewer condenses and interprets the meaning of what the interviewee describes and sends the meaning back, ideally until there is only one possible interpretation left of the possible multiple understandings. Furthermore, the transcribed interview is interpreted by the interviewer after the materials are structured. Proper analysis involves developing the meanings of the interviews, bringing the participant's own understanding into light and providing transparently and reflectively the researcher's hermeneutics on the phenomena.

According to Kvale (1996) the five main methodological approaches to analysis of meaning are: 1) condensation, 2) categorization, 3) narrative structuring, 4) interpretation and 5) an ad-hoc approach. Narrative structuring creates contextual stories. Meaning condensation connects the meanings expressed into briefer statements. Categorization means that the interviews are coded into categories and thus can reduce a large text into a few tables of themes and comments. Meaning interpretation stands for a more or less notional interpretation of the deep meaning of the text, while an ad hoc approach uses a variety of methods to result in words, tables, figures etc.

### 3.2.5 The social construction of validity

In social sciences research, findings should be reliable and verifiable in all stages. Hence, issues of verification should be addressed throughout the entire research process (Kvale, 1996). Communicative validity is obtained by validating the knowledge claim in the dialogue of the interview, while pragmatic validity is when the results of the research lead to the desired effect or action. In phenomenological research specifically where objectivity is a bias, validity comes from the proceedings and careful methodological steps that the researcher follows (sampling, data collection, bracketing, suspension of researcher's own beliefs, data analysis and presentation of the results using the double hermeneutics with reflective transparency and clarity). Similarly, reliability of the phenomenological methods comes by ensuring clearly and defining the steps involved. Thus, for whoever wants to replicate the steps on the data, can easily find how reliable the procedure was. Concerning generalizability, although this is not the aim of phenomenological research, some findings could be found that could give a sense of generalized conclusion under certain conditions and circumstances (Potter & Hupburn, 2005)

### 3.3 Theory of reflexivity

According to Etherington (2004), there are many ways of understanding and using reflexivity. Reflexivity requires researchers to operate on multiple levels. First of all, reflexivity requires self-awareness, but according to Etherington (2004) it is more than self-awareness, as researchers should be both aware of what influences their internal and external responses in the moment, while on another level researchers should be aware of what influenced their relationship to the topic and participants as a dynamic process of interaction. A greater focus

on the relationship between the researcher and the participant and what each brings into the research relationship could create further meaning and understanding of the topic. The theoretical, personal or cultural constructs guide our interactions as we engage in the research and represent the data.

According to Hertz (1997, as cited in Etherington, 2004), the usage of reflexivity in our representation of research helps to gain and share reflexive knowledge with others. This means that the reader not only gains knowledge about the topic but also how as researchers we acquired that knowledge. According to Etherington (2007) research practice has been developing against a backdrop of changing traditions, and reflexivity needs to be understood as part of those changes. Reflexivity challenges the researcher to be more fully conscious of their ideology, culture, politics and that of the participants. Additionally, reflexivity in research creates transparency that goes to address the ethical issues and the power relations between researcher and researched. Reflexivity also enables us to address what is known as well as how it is known, adding validity and rigour by providing information about the context in which data is located. It is important to distinguish reflexivity with subjectivity, as reflexivity opens up a space between subjectivity and objectivity where the distinction between content and process becomes blurred. Etherington (2004) also addressed some dilemmas concerning reflexivity. In the next paragraph I will list some of them, mentioning the ways I worked on them to be sure I took them into account.

The first dilemma is the lack of awareness. Some researchers may lack the necessary level of self-awareness required to use reflexivity. To address this issue, I worked closely with my supervisors while I was attending psychotherapy sessions throughout the research process. In this way I wanted to ensure both my research and academic competence for my personal development and maturity. In terms of my research competence, I had often discussed issues related to reflexivity and double hermeneutics in IPA research. For example, I took into account the fact that although I had suffered consequences of the crisis like financial loss and feelings of insecurity for the future, this was something that the unemployed participants (of a similar age to me) who visited me in my professional place may not have realized. This could create a blurred power dynamic in the process (as they didn't have a job while I had) and for this reason I tried to provide emotional empathy in the way that I addressed my interviewing process (to show that I can understand both as a psychologist and as a person of a similar age how they feel) but also being transparent, aware and reflective on the issue in the procedure of the analysis.

Another second dilemma that Etherington (2004) addressed in her book was subjectivity that can be seen as contaminant. We can think of positivist paradigms that hold enormous influence in quantitative versus qualitative research. Subjectivity under the reflective and heuristic prism of avoiding bias may be a valid methodological vehicle for an enquiry constructing a bridge between research and practice. Thirdly, the crisis of representation dilemma in which people struggle with how to locate themselves and their subjects in reflexive texts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, as cited in Etherington, 2004). This is a complex and multilayered problem that I addressed by following a careful step by step procedure where I became deeply familiar with the theoretical background of my research, data and analysis procedure. The whole doctorate procedure from the PAP-VIVA to this thesis writing took four years. During this time, I studied the literature, raised and discussed methodological debates in my supervision, and I have developed as a researcher and psychotherapist in a sense that I can critically assess and manage both data and human cases.

For similar reasons I feel that I was able to cope with the fourth and fifth dilemma that Etherington (2004) addressed which are lack of confidence and uncertainty and insecurity respectively. My daily practice as a psychotherapist and academic helped me to overcome my stress of exposure or the fear of judgement by the participants, supervisors or readers. Additionally, even if reflexivity may be a great challenge to a sense of certainty and security based on well-established and familiar practices, I feel that I have addressed my topic maturely via my experience as a Greek citizen and mental health professional. Smith's (2009) IPA guidelines, mentioned, as well as Etherington's (2004) views on reflexivity helped me to find my role in my research by describing as well as challenging my knowledge and beliefs developed from my professional background. Finally, another dilemma using reflexivity is the accusations of self-indulgence, narcissism, and solipsism. Etherington (2004) mentioned that the judicious use of our selves needs to be essential to the topic. I think that my supervisors contributed to this issue by creating debates which helped me to engage in double hermeneutic, seeking to probe the surface meanings by reading  between the lines for deeper interpretation, practicing to focus on the participant's world rather than on my own bias or pre-conceptions. Nevertheless, I was present and active in the process with an essential role of critically analyzing and reflecting on data and conclusions.

## 3.4. The reflective journal

In this section I would like to refer to the reflective journal and its importance in this study. Reflective journals are personal records of a student or researcher's experiences. It is common for doctorate students to record events related to their learning experiences either because their supervisors ask for it or because they find it useful to shape their knowledge which may even lead them to research questions. The recording process is usually done after every important event. These events can be an idea or question that may arise after a lesson, the feedback of a presentation, the experience of the exam, or even the thought process that precedes or follows after attending a presentation.

Journals can be either paper-based or online based, in a format that suits the student or researcher at any given time. My personal contact with journals began at the end of my graduate studies when I was trying to shape research ideas in order to prepare my final thesis. It certainly helped me, but I felt it would have helped me more if I had started recording the experiences at an earlier stage. That's why when I started my doctorate, my notebook was an integral part of my daily routine. I remember one of my teachers advising me not to pay too much attention to how I express my ideas and experiences in the journal because sometimes spontaneous recording is very important. It can take a lot of concentration and mental processing to record raw ideas in a scientific way using terminology or formal writing. I felt that this mental effort altered the completeness and spontaneity of the ideas, so I recorded my research ideas at first without much elaboration when they were born and turned them into a more complete form when I found time, especially at weekends.

The idea of my research and then my research questions came from my notes in the journal. I initially knew that I wanted to deal with the psychology of meaning, something that focused more generally on my studies in counselling psychology and existential psychotherapy. As I was about 28 when I started my doctoral studies, and experiencing the effects of the financial crisis both within my family and in the wider social environment, I felt the need to explore the ways in which people of my age make sense of their lives within the exogenous limitations created by a crisis even more. I remember being quite anxious about paying my tuition and wondering if it was worth the time and money to invest in the above studies in those conditions. I have always been a student and I chose to follow the path of my heart, believing that investing my money in knowledge could in no way be wasted. At worst it would be something that would contribute to my inner growth, at best it would help me in the range of professional opportunities I would have. I often felt that I was disconnected, and it was an effort to try to reconnect with it or to make individual meanings. As I recorded my thoughts, I began to wonder how other people my age felt who, having invested in studies,

experienced both job insecurity and the general insecurity of those days. Somehow, through these recordings, the subject of my dissertation began to take shape.

The words "meaning", "freedom", "responsibility", "loss" "loneliness", "crisis", "anxiety", "limitations" are often heard in the lessons within philosophy and the theories of the philosophers and psychologists that I refer to in my literature review. I knew that the head of studies, Emmy Van Deurzen,(2009) was particularly interested in exploring meaning and I started attending more targeted seminars and lectures to further concretise my ideas until in a conversation with her after the module that prepared people for a doctoral dissertation, I discussed with her what I had recorded and she showed interest, which gave me the confidence to continue.

During the research process the journal became even more necessary as I used it to note useful citations for my literature review, authors in my field of research I did not know, useful information to help me in the process of data collection and analysis, feedback notes from my supervisors etc. The process of reflective journaling helped me to strengthen my critical thinking, encouraged me to think about my own thinking (meta-cognition), and gave me a boost in the moments when I felt tired, as it made me feel a connection to my work. The handwritten notes, the tables, the figures, gave the feeling that something "personal" was happening between my research object and me which inspired me to continue investing in that relationship.

Journals help the researcher to reflect on a number of topics and situations through different viewpoints and perspectives. According to Homik & Melis (2007, as cited in Northern Illinois University Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, 2012), there are at least six stages in recording reflections. The first stage is observation. At this stage the student or researcher writes what they saw or heard in a lesson or in an event that impressed them (e.g. I heard a young graduate student attending one of my seminars say that he experienced stress when thinking about his professional future in Greece). The second stage is that of questions. In my example, I wondered why he was anxious about his professional future in Greece. The third stage is called speculation, and in my example I assumed that he was anxious because he feared that there would not be enough or suitable job opportunities for him in a country that has a high unemployment rate, low wages and limited positions in certain subjects. The fourth stage is called self-awareness. In this stage I put myself in his place thinking that I too would be stressed if I did not have a job in my field of study, or if I felt I would not have opportunities in the future in my field of study or how anxious I am anyway when I hear the media present the ominous future of the country's finances. The fifth stage is called integration of theory and

ideas. Reflecting on theories or ideas about cultural norms, the researcher connects their experience with what they have learned. In my example I could write that according to Yalom's theory (1980), stress is the result of the conflicts that a person has with the four facts of existence, namely, loss, meaning, loneliness and freedom. So we can assume that the financial situation in Greece creates fear of loss or meaning, as someone may lose their job, or not have the job they would like, or lose part of their income, etc. Finally, the sixth stage is called critique. There the researcher reflects on it, criticizing the above. For example, I can now reflect on my own anxiety experiences to see if I really experience stress when I feel that I will not have a good job in my field of studies.

### 3.5 The research design and data collection

### 3.5.1 Sample

The sample was a homogenous group of eight (8) highly educated, young persons, both males and females who have been raised in Greece, with at least one university bachelor's degree, and/or post-graduate qualifications (post graduate diplomas, masters and/or doctorate degrees) and an advanced English language certificate (and fluency in English). The criterion for the age group of the participants was between twenty-five (25) and thirty-five (35) years old. Additionally, the participants had to be unemployed for more than twelve months. The marital status of the participants was single (never been married) and with no children.

The recruitment criteria aimed to keep the group as homogenous as possible. The participants might come from a different economic (parental) family background, but it would be complicated and unethical to call for participants from a specific class or asking information for the source of their savings. For this reason, I concentrated on their current financial position (being without salary for at least 12 months, without any income from public benefits and without ongoing financial support from family members).

### 3.5.2 Recruitment strategy

The participants were recruited from an online advertisement on Facebook, other social networks such as twitter, printed advertisements in academic spots such as universities and colleges as well as in popular social meeting points in the cities of Piraeus and Athens, Greece. All the interviews were conducted at my office where I offer psychotherapeutic and other

psychological services. The interviews were conducted after sending the participants an information sheet by email.

At this point, I would like to note that I (as a practitioner), my colleagues, as well as the building followed all the standards that are regulated by the Greek Ministry of Health Affairs, in terms of health and safety.

## 3.6 Interviewing

Semi-structured interviewing was used. The interviews were conducted in English with the option to use Greek words or small phrases to aid expression. Initially, I thought that it would be easier to conduct the interviews entirely in Greek, but I finally decided to follow the boards' feedback of conducting them in English in order to avoid complications with translating and/or analysing issues from Greek to English. Also, the pilot study interview showed that the interview was fruitful and the English language was not an obstacle. As the participants were not English native speakers, they had the right to use small phrases or words in their native language (Greek) in case they couldn't find the appropriate English word or had difficulties to express/say what they really wanted. The transcription phase of the interviews was done by me with the help of an assistant. To ensure confidentiality I chose a professional assistant who was a sociology graduate and working in a university research centre. In that way I wanted to ensure the ethical management of my data. Furthermore, as a Greek speaker myself and speaking advanced English as a second language, I could understand how a Greek speaks English even if there were mistakes in the use of language. The Greek words or phrases were translated into English firstly by me and verified by a professional proofreader, certified in the English language (who also had knowledge of any psychological terminology used).

Additionally, I carefully double-checked the transcriptions several times, to be sure that the translated words or small phrases were accurate. The participants were informed beforehand that the words or small phrases would be translated into the English language, as well as they would have the right to check the translations if they wanted. The participants were asked targeted questions that opened the phenomenological discussion aiming on uncovering meaning. A sample of these kind of questions can be found in Appendix 2. In the beginning of the interview process, I asked some useful demographic questions such as the age of the participant, the academic qualifications earned (and the year of graduation), the area of studies, the level of studies and the number of years each participant was unemployed.

## 3.7 Reflexivity considerations

Engaging with reflexivity is a complex and demanding task in interpretative phenomenological research. Reflexivity must occur throughout the whole research process (Finlay, 2008). This means that I had to stay reflective in all different phases, from reading and preparing the background literature to preparing myself for the interview and then the analysis phases. All these areas had been considered and discussed in detail with supervisors. Notes from such discussions were always written in my reflective journals. Additionally, we have already considered the heuristic principles of our research. For this reason, I worked both in my supervision and personal therapy sessions on my underlying deeper thoughts and emotions by being interviewed with my own questions of the interview. In this way, I achieved a deeper understanding and awareness of how it is to be asked these types of questions. The importance of this was twofold: both to place myself in the seat of the participant emotionally (as a reflexive exercise) but also to consider my own opinions, emotions, meanings, attitudes and values, as a Greek citizen who belongs in the age group with the participants. It was also important to think how I was personally affected by the crisis (in both positive and negative ways).

According to Smith et al., (2009) this is the stage where the researcher actively engages with the text while they record these notes in the margin of the transcript. The researcher firstly tries to suspend bias and presuppositions, focusing on "bracketing" and what is described in data. As IPA also contains interpretation (and the double hermeneutic) the reflective journal is (again) essential for noting the origin and nature of the emergent interpretations (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008). This procedure helps the researcher to identify the intersubjective dynamics between them and the data (by observing what is subjective and what objective). Working in this manner, the researcher will learn to position themself in their own research (via the interpretation) rather than just present a description of the transcription in the analysis phase (Finlay, 2008). According to this plan, I spent enough time with my research supervisor talking about reflexivity and how I was going to be working with data.

Additionally, I brought my research reflexivity to my own therapy. It was interesting and useful to work on my experience of interviewing people within my own age group who brought their experience of living in the same country that suffers from a socio-financial crisis. Additionally, my experience as a professional psychologist and psychotherapist, helped me to facilitate the interviews in the best possible way.

## 3.8 The ethical framework of the research

In this section, I discuss the basic ethical framework concerning the practical feasibility of a piece of research. The criteria which ought to be used by psychologists have been mostly formalised by associations like the British Psychological Society and the American Psychological Association Thus, I obtained a copy of both, in order to conduct research that follows high ethical and scientific standards. For this project, ethical approval was sought from the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling (NSPC) ethics board, a sub-committee of Middlesex University.

### 3.8.1 Ethical issues in qualitative research

The issue of ethics in qualitative research is a particularly important issue of research design and research process that concerns every researcher. According to Hopf (2004) the term ethics in the social sciences contains a set of rules that regulate the relationship of researchers with all those involved in research and focuses on how researchers should treat people involved in the research process (Traianou, 2014). Issues commonly taken into account in qualitative research (and of course this study as well) are related to the free and consensual participation of participants after having been given information, their protection from any physical or mental harm, the preservation of the anonymity of the participants, the publication and utilization of research results as well as individual issues that will be developed in the following paragraphs.

The principle of modern ethics is found in the "Nuremberg Code" drafted in 1947 which contained principles relating to medical research as there were highly controversial and disgusting experiments during World War II. In modern psychological, social and educational research, ethics has emerged as an issue of paramount importance and great emphasis is placed on caring for and adhering to the principles that derive from it (Isari & Pourkos, 2015). The beginning was made in 1953 by the American Psychological Association (APA) which developed its own set of principles and rules that influenced other associations as well as fields outside of psychology (Blodgett, Boyer & Turk, 2005). An important step in complying with these rules is the establishment of ethics committees in educational and research institutes that decide whether a research is designed according to ethical principles before it is conducted and often checks whether they are properly implemented. For this reason, the researcher is called

upon to provide ways to deal with ethical issues that are involved or may arise in the research process (Traianou, 2014).

Therefore, there are some basic principles that govern both quantitative and qualitative research. However, due to the special nature of qualitative research (which includes for example face-to-face dialogue) some dimensions of ethics are differentiated or acquire another meaning (Willig, 2008). More specifically, we will look at some issues that pose a particular challenge to qualitative research:

1) Participants are not treated as "objects" or "subjects" from which we collect useful data but as persons in their entirety and mental phenomena are not considered as distinct and individual variables (Howitt, 2010).

2) The relationship that develops between a researcher and participants in a discussion can be perceived as friendly or even therapeutic (Willig, 2008).

3) The contact that develops between a researcher and participants may last in the case of field research and the researcher may have to be involved for a long time in the social life of the participants with the possibility of facing data and situations for which he is not prepared. (Willig, 2008).

4) The nature of the research process is open and exploratory, aiming at highlighting the experience and its personal meaning. This results in the type of data generated being rich, detailed and very personal, making it more difficult to protect the identity of the participants (Mason, 2018).

5) The research design is flexible and open to changes and modifications depending on the emerging findings. Due to this condition it is often not possible to define ethical issues in advance. Instead, the researcher must be constantly vigilant to address new ethical dilemmas and challenges during the process (Traiannou, 2014).

6) The open procedures involved in qualitative research (dialogue, physical encounter with the researcher, etc.), thorough and long-term analysis of the data can create contingencies that may jeopardize the anonymity of those who took part in the research (Traiannou, 2014).


### 3.8.2 Basic principles of ethics

Next I will list the basic principles of ethics as originally designed and approved by the Middlesex University Ethics Committee and I will mention the challenges that arose during the process and how they were addressed based on what was mentioned above.

**The protection and welfare of participants**

The most important principle which underpins all ethical codes, is the consideration of the welfare of the subjects who participate in research. In practice this means, that researchers try our best to protect the participants from being either physically or mentally harmed by the research process. The risk which a person would encounter during the research process must never be greater than the risks of a participant's normal lifestyle. The participants were informed that they had the right to ask for a break if they felt physically or emotionally tired, or they could stop the interview completely if it became too much for them. If there are any parts of the study, that might result in any type of harm, the researcher has the responsibility to identify and change them to avoid any possible consequences. All safety and health facilities were checked prior to data collection. For example, fire alarms, exits, elevators, fire extinguishers and medical emergency kits. According to the ethical policy, if the researcher does not consider all these basic principles, the research would be considered ethically unacceptable. However, no problems occurred during the process.

**Protection of the researcher**

As mentioned above, the interviewing process was done in my office where I offer psychotherapeutic and other psychological services. For personal protection, I conducted the interviews during working hours, when the secretary and other colleagues were present and working in the same flat. That was very important because the participants were unknown to the researcher. Additionally, I conducted interviews only when I felt physically healthy.

**The principle of informed consent**

Another fundamental principle is providing all the appropriate information to participants (Appendix 1, informed consent form). The information must be objective, without influencing the participant's will to participate. Hence, I explained any aspect of the research for the best-knowledge of the participants. The research didn't involve young children, or other kind of vulnerable population such as those who suffer from severe physical or mental illnesses.

**Anonymity and confidentiality**

All the information which was obtained about the participants (before, during or after the interviews), remain confidential unless it had been agreed otherwise in advance. In this study, there was no need to expose any information for study purposes. Thus, confidentiality,

was kept in all aspects. The data were stored per the provisions of the Data Protection Act (1984). For this purpose, I used a password protected computer that ran additional internet security software. All the voice-recorded data is planned to be destroyed from my computer approximately one year after submitting the thesis and will be stored only to the University secure server for a specific amount of time according to the regulations of the academic program. The person who helped me with the transcriptions has agreed not to keep any data of my research after the transcribing procedure. The contact details of the participants will be used only by me and will be destroyed at the end of the study according to the Data Protection Act. I also removed all identifiable information such as real names, universities attended, jobs previously held etc., so that the participants remain anonymous.

**The right to withdraw from research**

Before the onset of the interviews, I made it clear to the participants that they had the right to withdraw from research at any time. I explained to the participants that they had the right to ask for data to be destroyed or removed from the study at any time. This is a limitation that a researcher must always accept and be ready to recruit another participant if somebody withdraws before, during or after data collection and before publication. However, the participants were informed (before the onset) that the researcher cannot delete the data once the thesis has been submitted. All these details were provided in written form, before the start of the interview process (Appendix 1, informed consent form). Nobody asked to withdraw from the study.

**Debriefing**

After the data was collected, the participants were given any information they needed, or requested (Appendix 1, Debriefing form). Additionally, I discussed with them their experience and feedback on the research process, to identify and monitor any unintended effects of the research. The debriefing procedure was included, as it is of equal importance with the collection of data. I always provided the appropriate time that every participant needed before leaving the research setting. Additionally, I always ensured that the participants were both physically and psychologically well, providing them the appropriate time to relax and discussed with them any issues raised. The participants were asked if and how they wanted to be informed about the outcome of the research via email or regular letter (all chose email).

**Conclusion**

From the above it is understood that the observance of the principles of ethics is a complex task which is judged by many factors especially in the qualitative approaches due to the direct and sometimes close relationship that develops between the researcher and the participants and due to the open, flexible and unpredictable procedures. For this reason, when the researcher is faced with an issue that needs ethical clarification, they should compare the "costs" that the research may cause to the people involved with the "benefit" that the research will bring to the promotion of knowledge and the improvement of certain conditions. Unfortunately in qualitative research, the general rules of ethics may need to be redefined based on circumstances, and for this reason the researcher should have the attitude of a reflective professional who is constantly on the alert to resolve issues and dilemmas that may arise (Robson & McCartan, 2015).

Fortunately in the present study, everything went as planned without any serious dilemmas or difficulties. This does not mean that designing ethical issues was an easy process as it took a long time and advice from committees and supervisors to come to terms with all the difficulties I encountered and eventually adjust some conditions for the better (e.g. the place of the research, the hours that took place, etc.)

# Chapter 4
# Data Analysis

## 4.1 IPA analysis steps

Interpretive phenomenological analysis is an interesting and inspiring process, but it can be quite complex and time consuming. The first and one of the most important steps of the analysis is the familiarization of the researcher with their material. This requires special study of both the recorded interviews and the recorded and taped material. It is very important the researcher feels that they have entered the world of the participant as much as possible. Interpretive phenomenological analysis aims to record, visualize and prove how the participants perceive the phenomena investigated in the study and at the same time how the researcher perceives this material. Secondly, concerning the interpretation of the material, the researcher applies psychological concepts and theories that combine the object of the study with the data. The researcher must be especially careful if their interpretations extracted from the theories they apply are in line with the corresponding culture of the one who describes their

experiences through phenomena. In this way the researcher through the position of the one who observes the phenomena outside the world of the participant can see in the material information (insights) that the participant cannot locate the moment they talk about the phenomena. The strong point of interpretive phenomenological analysis is that it provides a flexible set of instructions that can be adapted to the way the researcher wants to work and to the objectives of his research. The instructions provided are often an illustration of an example that researchers can rely on to create their own analysis based on it. That is why the researcher must remain flexible and creative, but transparently stating the way in which they have chosen to work.

As mentioned above, the initial and one of the most important stages of the analysis is the familiarity of the researcher with the material, which is done with multiple readings of both the recordings, but even better with a combination of reading the recordings' transcripts and listening to the recorded material. The atmosphere of the recordings, the tone of voice, the lively way in which the participant describes the phenomena can offer new perspectives, observations and ideas. Often the emotional depiction of phenomena through voice or image, after many hearings can add new interpretations, something that happened in this research as well. Let us not forget that in this study the participants did not give interviews in their mother tongue. So it was very important that I had constant access to the recorded material, as it helped me in different places to understand different things from what I would understand through a written text. Many Greeks use English in a different way, as the syntax and grammar of the two languages are different. Some Greeks speak English translating what they want to say into Greek with English words. This approach, however, can often confuse the one who reads or listens to a text, as the translations do not reflect exactly what the speaker wants to say. The fact that my mother tongue is Greek, and knowing the way many Greeks speak English, helped me a lot to understand quite well what they wanted to say. Often during the interview I did a double check to make sure I understood exactly what they meant.

So after carefully reading and listening to the material, I made a table where on the left side there was each transcript, and on the right my exploratory comments (see Appendix 4, table 1) . In this phase I recorded my observations and reflections. These reflections often concerned not only the content of the discussion, but also the way the participant used the language, my interpretations through the prism of who was speaking and even my questions and queries (at a point where I felt that I wondered what the participant really meant). Then I added a column to the left of the text where I started to transform my comments into emergent themes (see Appendix 4, table 1). At this stage the researcher has to work more with the

comments they have made than with the transcript (although of course they check it again in combination). This is what I did at this stage. So I used my detailed comments from the previous stage that reflected the original material and formulated a concise phrase that reflects this content so that a topic is produced. At this stage my emergent themes were unique. I mean I was not using emergent themes that I remembered before. I always focused on the commentary and not on whether a theme looked like a previous one. This was something I did in the next stage of the analytical process.

In the next step, I started looking for connections between emerging topics in order to group it as Smith (2009) suggests. This grouping came about according to either their conceptual similarities or the similarities I had given to the titles of the emergent themes (always after double checking). Some of the previous issues here were completely abandoned as they either did not fit the emerging clusters structure or had a weak evidence base. For this purpose I used coloured markers with which I marked emergent themes that looked alike (see Appendix 4, table 2), and in the end could end up in a cluster or even some smaller sub-themes. The initial procedures included the transcription table and the column with the explanatory comments on the right. Then the creation of the left column with the emergent themes I did with the help of the computer and the corresponding copywriter. I then printed everything out and began to manually transfer the lists of emergent themes to large pieces of paper. Then I underlined the issues that seemed to me similar while I took a look at the explanatory comments I had made in the text to make sure. In the end the emergent themes with common color ended up in clusters and sub-themes that emerged, after reflection, that concerned their best categorization so that the analysis made sense.

## 4.2 Advice on IPA according to Smith, Flowers and Larking

As IPA is related to the detailed examination of lived experiences, the research question does not need to be extensive or very ambitious. What is of interest to phenomenological research is the result of the written report, taking into account that it should be evaluated whether it meets the set goals. Salmon (2002, as cited in Smith et al., 2009) realized that there may be a problem with very open research and advises that in order for the researcher to be sure that they have answered them adequately they must set specific objectives through steps which will eventually show that the question has been answered.

My study has an open research question "what meaning do young Greek professionals make of the Greek financial crisis?" which, however, is supported by two sub-questions. One concerns the impact (positive or negative) of the financial crisis on participants' daily lives, and the second concerns whether the financial crisis has affected participants' meanings, attitudes and values. So, the sub-questions act in part as objectives that support the main research question and help understand in the end that the question has been answered.

Regarding the participants in the research, Smith et al. (2009) point out that due to the idiographic nature of the approach, they should meet the criteria in order to represent the perspective and not the population. IPA is not interested in generalizing the conclusions, but in the knowledge that will be produced and is the result of a detailed study of the experiences of people who meet the criteria set by the researcher. The difficulty of generalizing the findings has always been a cause for criticism in the IPA approach, but researchers prefer small, homogeneous samples to study personal and meaningful responses at a deep level. The generalization of findings is not always the purpose and is not the only way of valid knowledge. There are other methodologies that deal with this which of course do not provide the appropriate space and time for participants to express the depth of their lived experiences. Many times IPA researchers study older research or similar research with their own to create a broader picture of their findings or also continue to work and extend their research (for example in my case I could do a similar study with a sample from Ireland or Portugal, countries affected by similar economic crises during the same period.

The small sample allows us to maintain homogeneity, and homogeneity helps in the detailed examination of a phenomenon, something that is often needed by counselling psychologists and other specialties who work in depth and detail in life-meaning phenomena. It is an interesting but complex discussion issue that takes time for the participant to unfold to make sense of it. The importance of the findings is provided both by the way the sample is selected and collected and by how it is processed and presented by the researcher. Transparency in the description of how all these processes were done (including the way the researcher reflects on themselves and during the various stages), plays an essential role in the knowledge that is produced. Smith (2009) believed that 3-6 participants would be enough for a university project, while in terms of doctoral studies he found it difficult to give a specific number, although a typical effective number would be 4-10 participants. Also, some researchers, in research questions that need it, do not emphasize so much on the number of participants, but on the number of interviews that can be two for each. My doctoral study contains a sample of 8 participants who each gave 1 interview, a number that emerged after discussion with the

university committees at various stages, and I believe that it contains a balance between individuals and volume of data. IPA is a process that takes a lot of time as the data is large, while on the other hand I wanted a sample that would be considered sufficient numerically to determine if there were common meanings among different participants, which would ensure a better representative image.

Ethical issues and the ethics that I have developed extensively in the respective chapter play a very important role in the research process. However, I would like to emphasize once again the advice of Smith et al. (2009) who argued that the basic rule of ethical issues is not to endanger physically and/or psychologically either the participant or the researcher (at least not more than in everyday life) during the research process. With that in mind, I designed my research based on the academic and research ethics proposed by Smith (2009), Middlesex University, the British Psychological Society and the American Psychological Association. I briefly mention, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, welfare of the participant and researcher, the right to withdraw from research and the debriefing.

In addition, Smith et al. (2009) warned researchers that data collection, transcription and analysis processes are time consuming. So I knew before I started the process that I needed at least two hours for the interview process per participant (45 minutes to 1 hour per interview, and another hour of space preparation, possible participant delay, welcome and farewell). I also needed about 7 hours of transcribing for about 1 hour of interviewing in all the interviews I transcribed myself since I was studying the data over and over again. In the interviews that my colleague transcribed, it took me about 3 hours per interview to verify them. In terms of analysis, it took me about 1 week per interview and several weeks to come up with common issues. The hours I needed for all of these procedures are very close to those reported by Smith et al. (2009) in their book.

Again, according to Smith et al. (2009), a researcher working with interpretive phenomenological analysis must be open-minded and flexible and show patience, empathy and a willingness to penetrate and respond to the world of the participants' experiences. At the same time the researcher needs determination, persistence and curiosity. These are qualities that took time, discussions with teachers and supervisors and practical application to acquire. This was helped by the pilot study which I discussed at length with my supervisors in order to identify practical weaknesses but also to improve my attitude and self-confidence as a researcher. One piece of advice from Smith et al. (2009) that I had in mind throughout the research process was that there is no 'perfect' data collection process, nor the real 'truth' in the interpretation, I just had to understand the perspective of participants as best I could. In

qualitative research, researchers are often confronted with confusing processes which they must first understand, process and record in a way that is understandable, polite and scientific for the readers. In any qualitative research there may be surprises that are not under the control of the researcher, so in addition to careful and detailed planning, the researcher needs a mature and flexible attitude in order to be able to process, negotiate and resolve them. That is why there is a supervisory process in which the researcher and doctoral student share their concerns with more experienced researchers in order to expand their knowledge, experiences and also increase their self-confidence.

# Chapter 5
# Findings

In this section I present an illustrative overview of the eight interviews that I conducted for this research. Firstly, I present a summary table (Table 1) of demographic information that I collected at the start of each interview. Participants were informed to fill as much information as they felt comfortable with, and therefore a few details are missing. The aim of the demographic information was simply to gather some background of their gender, age, level of studies and years of unemployment before the interview in order to help the reader have a better understanding of my target population and compare it to the literature. Then I present a summary table (Table 2) of super ordinate and sub ordinate themes, while discussing and quoting participants' contexts to support the way I did my analysis. All quotes are referenced by the participants' pseudonyms and the line number of the corresponding interview transcript. Peter's complete interview is included as an example at the end of this study in Appendix 3. Additionally, I would like to note that I did not correct my participants' English use of language.

Table 1 Demographic Information

| Name | Gender | Age | Level of Studies | Years of Unemployment before the Interview |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| George | Male | 27 | Bachelor | 2 |
| Peter | Male | 32 | Ph.D. (interrupted) | 3 |
| Maria | Female | 28 | Bachelor | 1 |
| Barbara | Female | 34 | Master (currently) | 2 |

| Elizabeth | Female | 25 | Master (currently) | Never had paid work |
| Ann | Female | 27 | Bachelor | Never had paid work |
| Effie | Female | 28 | Master | Never had paid work |
| Nicole | Female | 27 | Master (currently) | 1 |

Table 2 List of Themes and Sub-themes

| Meaning Making | Negative Impacts of Unemployment | Positive Impacts of Unemployment | Attitudes in financial Crisis | Values in financial Crisis | Dominant Emotions in financial Crisis | Social Observations & Culture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Additional Studies | Limitations on the purchase of goods and services | Learning to prioritize expenses | Hope and optimism and right to overcome crisis | Values didn't change but strengthened | Anxiety and disappointment of unemployment | Crisis affected everyone and everything |
| Art & Philosophy | Lack of autonomy | A chance for self-reflection | Acceptance of the harsh situation | Respecting the freedom of others | Suspicion and jealousy | Wrong political choices |
| Spending time in nature (land & animals) | Employers take advantage of crisis | People are more open to connect with others | The right to live in your homeland | | | |
| Spending time and sharing with others | Affecting identity | | | | | |
| Psychotherapy contributes in meaning making and self-awareness | | | | | | |

## 5.1 Themes and subthemes

First of all, before I start presenting the findings, it is important to clarify the way I have chosen to work in this section. The aim of this discussion, and of IPA more broadly, is not the generalization of themes and sub-themes to the general population. My aim is to present the experiences of the participants as they were expressed and of course to categorize some common meanings, attitudes, values and views under a common theme or sub-theme, as this gives the appropriate emphasis to some phenomena that to some extent reflect the group of participants in the given time period in which they were interviewed. This is in line with IPA that aims to highlight similarities and differences between participants and to summarise data

into themes. Finally, at the end of each sub-theme presentation I include a short comment of my opinion or interpretation if needed.

In sub-themes, I have included two, three or more quotes. The quotes offer a representation of the topics through the exact words of some participants and gives a sense of each participant. A theme or sub-theme is created based on the commonalities found in the interviews' data. However, as a researcher, I selected the most representative examples that give shape to the respective theme, without this necessarily meaning that the participants who were not included per topic do not share commonalities. Sometimes it is difficult to include all elements in a quote. However, the creation of themes and sub-themes was based on careful analysis based on the descriptive, linguistic and conceptual characteristics of the data. The conceptual features were particularly difficult to represent in a single quote, however from the whole interview the common character of some topics is often seen and thus they also contribute to their creation.

## 1. Meaning making

This is a major theme in my study and as such is explored at length through eight subthemes.

## 1.1 Additional studies

Most of my participants spoke extensively about ways to find or create meaning in their lives. One of their most frequent answers was their desire for additional studies. Some of them referred to degree oriented postgraduate studies (like masters), while others referred to online seminars, or personal study.

Maria expressed her desire to search for free online courses so that she can learn more at no cost:

> *"I had the chance to search for online courses that are free so I think that I am a little bit more educated than in the past without cost."* (Maria, 66-67)

Correspondingly, Barbara said that due to lack of work, she has enough free time to invest in a postgraduate program:

> *"I don't have a job, so I have a lot of leisure time. This year I started a master's degree, so until a few days ago I went to the university and we had the exams for the summer."* (Barbara, 82-83)

On the other hand, Elizabeth expressed her desire to spend her time learning even if it is not career related, as this gives her life meaning:

*"I keep studying, I am doing my master, I am doing a lot of educational, (pause). I want to learn all the time, I want to learn a lot of things, related or not to my profession, so this gives me meaning in my life."* (Elizabeth, 79-81)

Similarly, Ann added knowledge to her resume, looking for both work and meaning while unemployed:

*"Right now by searching for a job, by doing something, you know, about my current situation, by studying, many things ADI, Python, I am studying geography, because I mean, meaning and the situation is, this is the way I handle the whole process of meaning and the unemployment situation."* (Ann, 67-69)

Nicole added that she feels very proud of her ongoing training, despite the emotional issues that arise when you can't use all that knowledge. At the same time, she expressed the view that postgraduate programs should be free and accessible to all:

*"I like the subject, the object in which I am studying, and I feel very proud and I like doing this. Sometimes it's exhausting because you want to use all this knowledge but you cannot, and it would be better if there were masters for free or something like that so all people could have the chance."* (Nicole, 198-200)

Participants seem to find meaning by continuing their training in subjects relevant to their field of study. On the one hand, they try to increase their chances of finding a job, and on the other to make good use of their free time. Some also find the opportunity to experiment with different subjects. In any case, it seems to me that extra knowledge is valued and gives them meaning even though sometimes they feel they can't use it as they would like because of the reduced opportunities.

## 1.2 Art and philosophy

Many of the participants shared with me the need to give meaning to their lives through art and philosophy. By way of example, Peter talked to me about the important role that philosophy and creativity play in his life. He has even started looking for a profession that will contain such creativity:

*"I find meaning a lot in philosophy, in reading about both philosophical, psychological issues and concepts. So yes, philosophy definitely is something that I've always found soulless in a way, it's something that calms me. I try to create whether it's music, whether it's something else and that's also part of my seeking a job maybe that could involve some creativity."* (Peter, 149-153)

Similarly, Barbara shared with me an aspect of her own way of conceptualizing her relationship to music:

*"I like to listen to music, to play the piano." (Barbara, 84-85)
On the other hand, Elizabeth, added the importance of sharing art with loved ones:*

*"I am going with him (her father), take some pictures, we combine our hobbies, and we are getting fit (laughs). I like going to the cinema, I love the cinemas in the summer, I love concerts." (Elizabeth, 233-235)*

Maria seems to add another aspect on how important art is in crisis. She thinks that the crisis provided various opportunities for people who share such interests as they became more affordable for all:

*"I think that many beautiful things had happened that concerned for example art, art is an aspect that can inspire us, the designers. Some prices of some products are lower now, so although we don't have much money, we can, we are able to buy things in lower prices. We can go to the theatre or cinema with a reduced ticket which price is reduced."* (Maria, 62-65)

It seems that participants give everyday meaning to their lives through art and/or philosophy. Some are creators, others are readers, viewers, or listeners. In the end, it seems that art is quite accessible in times of crisis because educated young people want and know how to search for it. Additionally, it is a cost-effective interest.

## 1.3 Spending time in nature (land & animals and pets)

It seems that my research participants make sense of meaning through processes involving nature either by sightseeing, swimming, walking in nature, or caring for their pets and animals. George told me that it is not that difficult to find meaning in Greece:

*"It's not difficult to find a meaning. We have a very good climate and only by being at the beach and having swim, gives you meaning for life. Or go…the weather is very good most of the year and being at, (short pause) having trips, or walking at the mountain, going walking at the mountain gives you meaning for life. So it's fairly easy to find meaning of life in Greece." (George, 101-106)*

Similarly, Elizabeth told me about her walks in nature which she enjoys sharing with her father as well as the trips she organises and goes on with her friends:

*"My dad likes going for walk in nature, I am going with him, take some pictures, we combine our hobbies, and we are getting fit." (*Elizabeth, 233-234)

*And she added:*
*"I am trying to do things that I like and not spending a lot of money. I like traveling, I organize some trips or journeys with my friends around the year, I like being in the nature, I like doing camping, I like this a lot so …" (*Elizabeth, 238-240)

Effie is trying to find a way to make meaning without having a lot of money. She usually combines reading with walks by the sea, likes nearby trips, and caring for stray animals:

*"I try to be optimistic so I try to do things that there is no necessary for me to have money. I read books, I travel also but near, in near places and all these. I go many walks near the sea because I love the sea, and for animals also because in Greece we have so many stray*

*cats, dogs and all these. I try with my family together to help stray cats and dogs, so I go to feed them, to put water for them and ok there is necessary for this to have money but not so much." (Effie, 69-73)*

On the other hand, Barbara finds meaning by taking care of her pets in her home:

*"I have 3 cats in my house I like to care about them." (Barbara, 84-85)*

Here I noticed that the participants make meaning through the natural beauty of the country. The climate, the nice weather, nature, and the care of animals give meaning to many people's lives. I would say that all of the above are commodities accessible to anyone residing in Greece, at a reasonable cost.

**1.4 Spending time and sharing with family/ friends/partners**

In addition, participants shared with me their need to find meaning through sharing their lives with other people. Here we observe that young Greek professionals are managing their "social dimension" in order to find meaning in crisis.

George told me that even if you don't have a job, you can find meaning through relationships with other people who can give you the strength to continue living:

*"So it's fairly easy to find meaning of life in Greece. That's my opinion. And having friends that have the same sight for this matter, gives you meaning of life even if you don't have a job, even if you don't have money. You find a friend, gather at home a night, and you have fun. And this may take you all night, and the morning comes and then you see that you have been with friends and this gives you the strength to go on and make another day pass."* (George, 105-110)

Similarly, Maria told me that she loves spending time with her friends at home, as this requires less spending without limiting the depth of their relationship.

*"Well, I love my friends, consequently I love whatever we do together. Many times we are in, we prefer to stay at home than go out because not having much money to spend. So it is a change that plays during this crisis. Before the crisis, I am sure that we could go wherever we would like but ok the one stays close to the other, we can discuss our personal problems or we can discuss about things that we think or our ideas, our dreams. I don't think that it is important that these discussions take place at home even if they took place somewhere else. So, probably this kind of relation is more deep because you know, many people are still my best friends but ok, we are not out, we are at home. That also works."* (Maria, 103-110)

Nicole also talked about her experience of spending quality time with her family and friends without having to spend a lot of money. She seems to have learned to appreciate this aspect of life too:

*"On the other hand, we have appreciate many other things. such as family, such as living without having to think all the time about money and how to use them and find something*

*that is more expensive and more expensive, we manage to find solutions, cheaper solutions, better solutions. We had good time with our friends, we didn't have to go out in restaurants or other clubs to have fun, we would stay home, watch a movie, say jokes and we found a solution." (Nicole, 30-35)*

Barbara added that factors like empathy, love, emotions and sexuality give more meaning to different kinds of relationship:

*"I find meaning in love, in good relationships. I think they should have empathy, they should have love, a lot of emotions, positive emotions, compassion, sexuality but not only the sexuality, sexuality with emotion, relational."* (Barbara, 65-67)

Elizabeth talked about her friends and family. She notes the importance of these people to the extent that she identifies them with the very meaning of her own life:

*"Generally, I think that I find meaning in my most important people and the moments that I have with them. A good conversation with a friend, a walk with my father, a movie with my mother, holidays with my brother, all the important people that I have in my life and I am lucky enough to have them a lot of years, my friends and all the people, I feel lucky enough and they are the meaning of my life right now." (Elizabeth, 75-79)*

Ann gives meaning while sharing real and imaginative moments with her friends. She and her friends often like to give meaning by using their imagination because there are things they cannot accomplish due to financial constraints:

*"We travel through google maps, most of us. Actually, I don't go out much and if we do go out, we will go to Agia Paraskevi square and drink a beer. I feel that we are old people, trapped in the bodies of 27 years old, because you know, we go from one place and then they come to our place, we go to their place."* (Ann, 154-157)

I think it is easy to see that some participants make meaning through their relationships with others. We observe that each one expressed stories from different aspects of social life with the common denominator being that everyone finds meaning and support through sharing in human relationships.

## 1.5 Psychotherapy's role in meaning making and self-awareness

In this sub-theme, we observe the importance of psychotherapy in making meaning. This is a particularly important and welcome finding in the research as it demonstrates the value of psychotherapy in difficult times.

Peter shared with me that he makes important meaning in his life through psychotherapy:

*"Right now I would say the primary way that I create meaning, if we are talking outside myself for a second, is psychotherapy. That's a very basic thing for me, because I need to know who I am, I need to be ok with myself working my relationships and that's a very basic part of it for me."* (Peter, 146-149)

On the other hand, Effie talked about the importance of psychotherapy to issues of self-awareness that contribute to meaning making:

> *"In my opinion, I think that it is very important to have someone to talk about any problem you even think you have and this person is a stranger. There is nothing to win for this and you only speak, he or she listen, and this person will say something as a point and you will be like, oh I haven't thought about this before, so you start learn more about yourself and this, I think that helps you, to understand your all existence, in my opinion. It is the way of my thinking…"* (Effie, 120-125)

Barbara also talked about the importance of self-awareness through psychotherapy while we were having a discussion about meaning making:

> *"So the psychotherapy, when I started this training program about psychotherapy, it was a good time to start my own psychotherapy and I started to learn things about myself, I started to read a lot, reading similar books, I started to observe a little more the people, how do they behave, how do they think, how do they feel, what are their interests, their values?"* (Barbara 219-223)

Similarly, Ann referred to the support she received through psychotherapy concerning important issues related to further meaning making in her life:

> *"Actually it helped me, take control of the situation and you know, in every way possible. I mean I wouldn't have finished my studies if it wasn't for all those years to pay them myself not for this but for life, it's a part of life."* (Ann, 249-251)

Although attending psychotherapy sessions was not one of the criteria for participating in my research, it was very interesting to note that half of the participants had a positive attitude towards the psychotherapeutic process, realizing some of its benefits in the difficult times they went through. There is an implication that others going through similar circumstances might also benefit from psychotherapy. Further research that explores how psychotherapy might help Greeks deal with long-term crises would be useful and would give more evidence of this.

## 2. Negative Impacts of unemployment

This is also a major theme in this study and as such it is explored at length through four sub-themes. Here, I focused on the negative effects of unemployment as presented by the experiences of the participants.

## 2.1 Limitations of the purchase of goods and services

This sub-theme emerged from the participants' experiences on daily constraints and limitations due to low or non-existent income. As can be understood, participants are in a difficult position of having to reduce even their basic needs, both in goods and services.

George shared his experiences. He says that his parents cannot help him financially, so he had to cut many of his expenses:

*"The way that I experience Greece concerning my life its difficult, ok, everyone knows that. I have not any background, any big background from my parents that they can't help me economically to everything I want to do. For example, when I want to buy a new car, I can't buy a new car. I have to buy a used old one. I cannot do whatever I want. Can't do, I can't go on a vacation trip and spend a lot of money. I have to be backed up I have to catch some slack on my expenses." (George, 15-20)*

At the same time, he noted the change he experienced in his life compared to when he was eighteen:

*"When I was 18 years old, we went to the supermarket with my mother and we didn't care if we take more of this stuff, or more of this stuff, we didn't care. Now when I go to the supermarket with my girlfriend, I am very, my wallet is very closed. I can't take much stuff."* (George, 170-173)

Similarly, Peter talked about his own limitations, noting that he has to be very careful about the way he spends his money:

*"The crisis has made it very difficult to find work and that means that I have limited resources and that usually means that I can't do all the things that I used to enjoy, I can't really go out with friends as much, I can't maybe buy the things that I like, or spend some money on entertainment let's say so I have to be very resourceful with what I find, so I have to make sure that what I do doesn't cost much or you know I have to rush on it, I have to say ok, I can go to the cinema once per month or you know do things like that, so that's the financial aspect of it."* (Peter, 8-14)

Elizabeth also explained that the experience of living in crisis is difficult for her because without a salary she can't do what she wants:

*"It is very difficult, very difficult. It has to do a lot with the money, it has to do a lot to be independent, because we are dependent if you don't have your salary, your money, you can't do anything, you can't do what you want, you can't go on holidays and spend your money because you don't have your money"* (Elizabeth, 52-55)

In addition Ann explained that she has money only for the very basic things:

*"So yes, it has affected you know, the payment stuff, which is not you know, you don't live with those amounts. You go buy your coffee, pay your gas and that's it."* (Ann, 109-111)

Effie presented a similar aspect where she expects her parents to give her some money for basic things while she feels guilty for this:

*" I feel guilty, because I understand that my father works and he has money, and I am in their house and he has to feed me, to buy things for me, basic things…bla bla bla and I have nothing,*

*in particular I have nothing of my own you know. Nothing belongs to me because I don't give money for this, my father gives money."* (Effie, 145 – 147)

Understandably, some of my participants are being forced to cut back on spending and change their spending habits. We also see the family playing an active role in supporting the younger unemployed members of the family, who are trying to live actively even if they do not have enough money to spend.

## 2.2 Lack of autonomy

This sub-theme presents the experiences and emotions that my participants experienced due to lack of economic autonomy. Unfortunately, unemployment is forcing educated young people to stay mostly with their parents which provides them economical safety and care. The quotes in the previous section by Elizabeth (52-55) and Effie (145-147) also highlight their lack of autonomy.

A similar feeling of shame is expressed by Ann, who is forced to live under the protection of her parents in order to meet her living needs:

*"Yes, I feel ashamed being you know, protected by my parents still…"* (Ann, 37)

Barbara told me that she lived by using her father's pension who passed away during the crisis:

*"There was a connection because my father, when he died, that period, it was the period that he was ready to become a pensioner. And because he died, pension passed to us but we had to wait."* (Barbara, 125-126)

It seems that participants feel embarrassed and guilty for not having the opportunity to support themselves financially. On the other hand, families seem to support the unemployed in whatever way they can.

## 2.3 Employers take advantage of the crisis

Due to rising unemployment, employers seem to have taken advantage of the financial crisis. The result is low wages, working in the black market, and many unpaid hours of work. Peter told me about his experience:

*"It was mostly just very small opportunities through maybe someone I knew but didn't end up working out. And usually the reason given was, oh you know it's the crisis, we don't have enough money, we can't sustain this position or something like that."* (Peter, 45-48)

Similarly, Ann told me about her low paid experience as a professional athlete:

*"Of course they could. I mean, they pay you like 200 euros per month. If they couldn't, they could also tell you, you know what, this is an amount and I am not able to give you, I pay for your gas or whatever, something else. There is always an honest way to give and take. So yes, it has affected you know, the payment stuff which is not you know, you don't live with those amounts. You go buy your coffee, pay your gas and that's it. "*(Ann, 107-111)

Job opportunities in the crisis are limited. Employers are seen as taking advantage of the situation by reducing salaries, or by not providing benefits (insurance, bonuses etc.). Their excuse is based on the argument that their own earnings have been reduced as well.

## 2.4 Affecting identity

Ann and Elizabeth shared explicitly with me their opinion concerning unemployment and the fact that it affected the way they perceive their identity.

Ann talked about her feelings of insecurity, and the days she feels that she doesn't know how to define herself:

*"It all comes down you know to, when I don't feel ok and when I feel insecure, it all comes down to not being productive. Productivity at least to me, is a way to conduct an identity. And now that I am not a student, I don't have an identity." (*Ann, 60-62)

Similarly, Elizabeth feels that her unemployment creates a sense of incompleteness:

*"So, the fact that I do not have a job, does not let me feel complete, so I am not complete. There is a part of my life, I have my friends, I have my family, I have my people, I have everything and I don't have a job, so I don't feel complete and I have tried for this job."* (Elizabeth, 69-71)

Professional identity seems to play an important role in human life. Therefore, lack of work creates problems in the way a person perceives and defines themselves. As shown by the participants' quotes, there is a sense of lack of identity, or feeling of incompleteness in the way they perceive themselves.

## 3. Positive Impacts of the crisis

A very important point in my research was to discuss possible positive impacts that emerged during the crisis. It seems that there were several such effects according to participants' views.

## 3.1 Learning to prioritize expenses

Most have talked about the fact that the crisis has taught them to prioritize both the way they choose to spend their money as well as the way they spend their time and energy. Maria told me about how she experiences others and herself on the issue of priorities. It seems that she has started to reduce her expenses in what really matter for her and makes her happy:

*"I think everybody has now in his personal life, things that he needs. For example, we travel once a year not during Christmas, Easter, summer etc. We buy things that we really need and we do only things that make us feel happy"* (Maria, 118-120)

Barbara also discussed about the way she set priorities. However, she added that money should not control everything in life:

*"I think yes. Ok, the money is important, sure, because you have to live and to pay the taxes and to pay bills and to buy things about your house and to pay for your education, there is a practical part. But I don't thing that is the only part of life. It's an important part but it cannot manage your life."* (Barbara 146-148)

The crisis has helped participants learn how to set their own priorities and how to make the most of their money and resources. I think that in an over-consuming era it is useful for someone to make wise choices on how to make good use of their available resources.

## 3.2 Chance for self-reflection

Many participants explained that the crisis was also an opportunity to reflect on other important issues. Peter shared his experience on how he allowed himself to find the time to reflect on alternative positive aspects and meanings in the crisis:

*"Ok just talking about the positives, I have been able to I think allow myself some time to redefine both myself and where I am going, like you said, what my meaning is, you know, try to find those things so yeah that is a positive aspect is that even though it means that I don't have work helping me make meaning, I can make meaning in other ways and I have more time for that."* (Peter, 294-298)

Similarly, Elizabeth, discussed how the crisis pushed her to look for other possible paths that could help her moving forward:

*"The crisis is combined with burdens, so I found a lot of burdens in finding a job in doing every education that I want because the money are a lot, so when I am under those, in front of those burdens, I have to find another ways or another paths. So those paths, I have traveled them due to the crisis so I feel happy and blessed about them. So crisis, it is difficult, I don't feel fun or happy that I don't have a job, I feel stressed and disappointed and all the bad feelings but I am not idle, so I feel lucky that I have tried to find another way to not be idle and keep going."* (Elizabeth, 295-300)

Ann also shared her experience on how the crisis has helped her to form an identity (which she considers as a positive):

*"Under one big category, I would say that it helped me find myself, know myself actually I mean you know, making identity. Through knowing myself you know, I started caring about knowing others and not make assumptions from the fact that we are all in this together and you know one big, not advantage, one big positive that I can think of is that I started giving meaning you know, to how I spend my time without chasing money."* (Ann, 262-266)

Similarly, Effie argued that life is not only good but also difficult. Hence, the crisis is probably a challenge to make her try harder:

*"Yes I think so, there is always something positive at the end of something bad. Life is not only good times, good things and all good, you know. Life is also difficult, so I think that there is always positive affection of something bad. Personally, the most positive affection, outcome, is that I stay optimistic and I try to do my best. Maybe I try more than I will try if there is no crisis, you know …"* (Effie, 175-178)

Nicole, reflected on the fact that difficulties in life make somebody wiser:

*"There weren't many positive sides. But you change the way you live I think, and your values in a better way. You don't change them exactly. You have your values but you keep.. you become more wiser I think, something like that"* (Nicole, 233-235)

It seems that the crisis created the appropriate space and time for deeper reflections. Additionally, some participants experienced becoming wiser, while they were attempting to overcome the challenges. Others felt that the crisis pushed them to move forward. In any case it seems that the difficulties have led to something positive in their lives.

### 3.3 People are more open to connect with others

In addition, some of the participants noted that people became more open to connect with others.

George shared with me the fact that lack of money leads people to come closer to their friends and relatives:

*"Yes, Of course, don't think all the time about money, because you don't have money. So you are being closer to other people, to friendship, to family, and you try to overcome the crisis together. So yes, if we had money, and we have a good financial situation in Greece, maybe everything was less eeehm personal."* (George, 123-126)

Similarly, Peter told me about his experience of having to make several online friendships as he did not often have the money to support his social life. However, in his interview he told me that this opened his social circle:

*"...sometimes it causes friendships to become stronger and I think also in my case at least because of the fact that I don't have as much money that I found more people that I can relate to online for example because I live a lot of my interaction through that and I find similar people in terms of mindset and values online even in Greece but in another city for example or from another country completely."* (Peter, 266-271)

Crisis seems to have helped people come closer and be more open to new experiences (such as online friendships). My participants report that limitations on activities that require money have brought people closer making them more open to share aspects of their lives and thus utilizing effectively their energy and time.

## 4. Attitudes in crisis

This is another major theme in this study and is explored through four sub-themes. This major theme emerged from participants' views on their life attitudes and their reflection on whether they remained stable or changed during the economic crisis and the shock of unemployment.

### 4.1 Hope, optimism and the right to overcome crisis

Participants appear to be facing the crisis with the attitude of hope and optimism. Most believe in the human right to overcome the crisis and live a more prosperous life through education and hard work.

Elizabeth explained that although it is difficult to survive the crisis, the situation will be changed through effort:

*"I like living here, but it is difficult to survive here, let's say. In generally, but I hope that this will change, I believe that if you try and if you keep trying and not stop this, what you want I think you will get in the point that you want, and you will achieve everything that you want." (*Elizabeth, 12-15)

And she added:

*"But I believe it exists at the same time with the fun part of Greek people because even if you are sad and even if you don't know what to do with your future, with your life, with your family, with your job, everything falls apart, I think that as a nation, as people we have our hope, we believe that at some point we will achieve what we want."* (Elizabeth, 20-23)

Similarly, George expressed his feeling of hope and patience as he does not want to leave the country:

*"I am patient, basically I am patient. I am waiting and I don't. Maybe I am patient because I don't want to leave Greece. But I think that the crisis is going to overcome. And I am positive. Yes, positive is a nice word" (*George, 194-196)

George seems to have confidence, noting that Greece has gone through similar crises in modern history:

> "*But I think that this is going to pass. It's history. History repeats herself.*" (George, 189-190)

Similarly, Maria expressed her attitude that she is not going to leave the country, and is constantly looking for innovative ways to have a better future:

> "*I am not going to leave my country, I am not waiting to change things without discuss with myself or trying to change myself. I think that I belong to the last category, I am trying to find collaborators or colleagues with whom, we have the same way of thinking, the same way of searching, and same way of living. We can share our ideas. The ideas of one may, or can complete the ideas of the other. So we are trying to find innovative ways of working in order to survive and I am sure that we will survive during this crisis.*" (Maria, 202-207)

It is very important for some of the participants to maintain attitudes of hope, optimism and the right they have to overcome the crisis with patience in order to live a good life in their country. Apparently, they believe that education, innovation, sharing of ideas, competition and hard work will give them the advantage to achieve this while they believe that the climate and the hopeful attitude of the citizens of the country contribute to this optimism. George also makes an interesting point: "… this is going to pass, it's history. History repeats itself". His phrase led me to assume that he draws optimism from the fact that Greece has faced similar political and social crises in the past, which had similar economic consequences but in the end the citizens managed to rebuild it. It is as if he shows confidence that the same will happen now and so he keeps up his hope.

### 4.2 Acceptance of the harsh situation

Through the discussion it appears that my participants have started to accept the harsh situation that takes place in their country.

George told us that there is no reason to constantly think of money:

> "*Yes, Of course, don't think all the time about money, because you don't have money. So you are being closer to other people, to friendship, to family, and you try to overcome the crisis together*" (George, 123-125)

Maria revealed an attitude of adjustment in order to overcome the difficulties:

> "*I don't think that I could change something if I just wait. So, everybody should be open-minded in order to accept such a situation because unfortunately this is the situation which*

*we cannot change it in a way that we prefer, in a quick way, in an effective way, you know. We should be open-minded and try to adjust our lives to that." (*Maria, 152-155)

It seems that participants have accepted the fact that the situation is harsh at present. They have lived in this situation for many years, and they have learned to manage their feelings about the crisis, working patiently towards a better future.

**4.3 The right to live in your homeland**

The participants expressed the need to live in their country.

George said:

*That, I do want to leave Greece because I want my children to grow up in this environment, with this climate, with these people that they don't care about if you have money or if you don't have (*George, 153-155)

Additionally, Maria expressed a similar need, but she noted that she also has to change in order to make things work for her:

*I am not going to leave my country, I am not waiting to change things without discuss with myself or trying to change myself.* (Maria, 202-203)

Effie also shared her love for Greece and the attitude of deserving to try in order to survive:

*"If you, when you wake up in the morning, and you go outside and here in Greece, you see the sun and all of this, you have to feel happy and you have to say to yourself that I will succeed, as the song says, "I will survive" from all this situation, it's when you are in the middle of the sea, in the sea, and there are stormy conditions, the captain is still there and try to survive, so I think that we are, we are all the captains of our lives and we try to survive."* (Effie, 195-199)

On the other hand, Peter expressed his frustration, but it seems that he still tries to love the place where he lives:

*"I want to love Greece as a nation more but like you said, especially as a young professional, I feel like its slapping me in the face and it's telling me, I don't care about you and I don't care about finding the right job for you or making sure that you have a place in society and in the workplace, so it's very difficult."* (Peter, 101-104)

It seems that the participants love the country for the goods it offers (such as the warm climate and the natural beauty). Their decision to stay in the country seems conscious, even if there is dissatisfaction with the way that governments handle the economic issues.

**5. Values**

Values is another major theme in this study and is explored through three subthemes.

The phenomenological exploration of attitudes and values and their role in Greece of the economic crisis was one of my main interests in this research. In Greek society, people often place attitudes and mainly values as something static and objective. On the contrary, as a phenomenological researcher and psychologist I believe in the right of every human being to construct and express their own attitudes and values as this enables the individual to live authentically and expands their horizons and abilities.

## 5.1 Values were strengthened rather than changed

The majority of participants in this study initially seemed to agree that their values did not change but instead strengthened during the crisis and unemployment.

Elizabeth explained to me how she experiences her values:

*"I don't believe that my values have been affected. Right now, I can't imagine a way that my values will be affected" (Elizabeth, 257-258)*

Similarly, Effie confirmed that the crisis did not alter her values (through which she perceives the image of herself as well).

*"I still feel me, I want to, at the end, I want to say that I don't, I didn't leave the crisis to make me someone else, but I stayed me."* (Effie, 162-163)

Maria explained how her values remained and make her feel good about herself:

*"I don't think so, because I think that my family had given me, taught me a way of life, a way of thinking, made me be well with myself."* (Maria, 84-85)

Peter talked about the fact that he always acted in accordance with his values:

*"So my values were just my values and then I did my work, of course according to those values. But I think I never took them from off work if that makes sense. Because there are some people who think like that, you know, I don't know, let's say social workers who believe and helping people and so forth but there are people who just say I believe on that either way, whether I am a car repairman or this. So yeah, I think that was part of it."* (Peter, 286-290)

All participants stated that they maintained their values despite the difficulties of the crisis. The participants talked about their values as something sacred that was passed on to them by their family or empowered by their personal effort. It seems that they incorporate their values as a part of their identity that remains stable despite the difficulties.

## 5.2 Respecting the freedom of others

The participants also spoke specifically about respect for the freedom of other people. That was a common value as it often seems to be shared in the dialogues that took place.

Here is what Effie told me:

*"I still want to help other people, not only in my job, generally in my life. Also, I try not to judge or criticize others. The way of others living is their opinion, their job, in a … it has nothing to do with me. Everyone has the right, the freedom to live as they want, so there is nothing to do with me and I think this is a value, a kind of value, to respect others' life."* (Effie, 154-157)

Likewise, Ann expressed an assumption that she doesn't refer to freedom within a political manner (something that shows me its existential significance):

*"A value to me that you know, I don't want to see or first of all I don't want to interfere with anyone's freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of dressing, of expressing himself or herself and I actually don't like when I see someone being, I don't know, I don't want to put it under a political category because I am going to use the term fascist behavior."* (Ann, 210-213)

Barbara also talked about respect for others:

*"My values in life, I think, they don't have changed in crisis. I think they are the same because I took these values from my family and I always had these in my relationships, in my behavior out there. My values are family, are love, are emotion, friendship, education, self-awareness, to behave well to others and do not do bad things to them, to respect the others, to be friendly and kind, and with empathy, do not gossip or to be a bad person to other, to not be ironic."* (Barbara, 140-144)

The participants seem to respect the freedom of others and their right to live as they please. To me this seems like deeper existential values coming from Greek culture and education. Greeks seem to have a close connection with the concept of freedom as they have lived for many years enslaved by others. In addition, participants show the willingness to help other people and without criticizing them for their choices which is a form of empathy to the lives of others.

## 6. Dominant emotions in crisis

The dominant emotions in crisis is another theme of our study that contains two subthemes.

### 6.1 Anxiety and disappointment of unemployment

George had an angry tone of voice when he discussed the fact that he cannot find a job even though he is a qualified graduate:

*"I do have a belief that someday all these studies, all this waiting for a greater future will be paid off. But I think for now that it is a pity that someone like me that someone,*

*graduated in Greece, has a certain degree of expertise and cannot, cannot get this to work just because there is no jobs out there. This is what I feel."* (George, 78-82)

Similarly, Ann feels ashamed and insecure concerning her future because of the impending unemployment:

*"I am at this point that I feel ashamed being helped from my parents. I have searched for a job since May, and I am starting to feel a little insecure about my future."* (Ann, 30-32)

Peter feels good about the fact that he has had to open up his options and choices but on the other he feels defeated by the fact that he can't find a job:

*"I find myself on the one hand thinking this is a good thing that I have open options in terms of my direction but on the other hand I am thinking, I am a little (short pause) defeated by the fact that I still haven't been able to find a job so it's those two things clashing."* (Peter, 25-28)

Similarly, Elizabeth shares with me the fact that she lives under stress:

*"And I am under a lot of stress, this is the most difficult part, the thoughts, that you think, what am I doing, have I done it well, is it right, is it wrong, I spent a lot of time, a lot of money, a lot of years, a lot of thoughts, everything, of myself, and my life and my people and my family have invested on something that doesn't give me anything back."* (Elizabeth 32-35)

Nicole shares with me that she is affected by the fact that her parents feel anxious about her future:

*"I don't think that they became better. I think that they became worse because parents, let's talk about people at this same age as me, as I am, parents want their children to be fine, to have a job and to be independent etc. When this doesn't happen, they are more anxious, they have more problems, and they don't want to but they make these problems, they transfer these problems to their children but they don't know the way to manipulate this and this can make things bad. I think that there are more fights."* (Nicole, 143-148)

Barbara on the other hand feels that unemployment is a source of anxiety but there are also other emotions in life:

*"Surely, it's a source of anxiety, the economical fact because it is about survival but I think that the economical fact it is not the only thing in life. I find much more meaning in other facts like relationships, like emotions, like love, like creating a family, so I think people should care about these facts and not only for the economical."* (Barbara, 48-51)

It makes sense that young graduates in this research experience feelings of anxiety and disappointment as they fail to gain their financial independence. This restricts their sense of freedom as they are financially dependent on others, or they have to constantly limit their needs. This threatens their well-being and reduces their quality of life while remaining in a state of uncertainty.

**6.2 Suspicion and envy**

Barbara expresses a sense of suspicion that she observes in others as well as in herself. She believes that the crisis extends to the values and the way people treat each other:

*"The only thing I think it affected is my faith in people. When I was younger I was more, I trusted people very much, now I am more suspicious about their behavior, about their motives so…Sometimes it bothers me, because when I need someone I don't know well maybe I am suspicious for what reason he talks at me and why he approaches me from the one hand and maybe my relationships to be suspicious if this person have emotions from me or if he has a parallel relationship and if he want me only for sex and only for other reasons but on the other hand I think that my suspicion is a little good thing. Because if you trust everyone maybe someone does some bad thing to you. "* (Barbara 153-160)

Nicole mentions that due to the lack of opportunities, people are jealous of others' who are luckier, or keep opportunities to themselves when they are appear. It is understandable that this phenomenon exists where there are no equal opportunities for everyone.

*"It isn't good but it happens because when you don't have many choices, sometimes it happens without understanding it, it can happen to me. I have done this without wanting it. You don't have many choices, and sometimes when other people are luckier than you, you are happy about them but you are a bit jealous too and that isn't good. And that is it. Or you may find something and you want to keep it only for you."* (Nicole, 127-131)

Ann, on the other hand, talks about the injustice she feels about not having the opportunity to live as her other friends and eagerly awaits her turn. In this case, envy is not a negative feeling towards others, but an expression of injustice for what you want but cannot have:

*"I love Japan, and have read many things about Japan but I haven't been there. Kind of the same, other than that, this kind of makes me a little bit jealous or impatient when it will be my turn."* (Ann, 175-177)

The lack of opportunities seems to make people envious of what they don't have. In some cases, participants feel that there is injustice because of the limited choices, while others may have a different quality of life. Additionally, there is suspicion about the intentions of others as there were exploitation phenomena in the crisis period. For example, undeclared work or wage cuts increased as employers sought the same or increased profit with a view to their pre-crisis personal profitability. Also, my many years of experience as a psychologist aligns with what Barbara says. Many educated young people in their attempt to avoid financial responsibilities (such as those of starting a family or even a relationship) resorted to dishonest practices in order to enjoy the benefits of relationships (companionship, sexual intercourse, etc.) but did not want to shoulder responsibilities while simultaneously promising their partners a formalization of the relationship, through  marriage or the creation of a family.

**7. Social observations & culture**

## 7.1 Crisis affected everyone and everything

Elizabeth observed that there is support among citizens as they share similar experiences and emotions:

*"So everyone supports each other, we discuss it, we can express our feelings, we have the same feelings, the same, we feel the same stress, we live in the same situation so we are together and hope".* (Elizabeth, 109-111)

Ann likewise expressed her need for understanding and solidarity as she believes that the majority of young people live in the same situation:

*"I mean I expect from others to understand the situation because we are all in it, no matter if I get paid 300 euros or if you get paid 200 euros it's the same for everyone. We are not millionaires. If we were it's another discussion."* (Ann, 228-230)

The crisis affected all citizens in one way or another. Due to this fact, feelings of solidarity were created which also led to charitable acts towards fellow citizens. It seems that people enjoy sharing their feelings, or even goods with others. They also give and search for this kind of understanding and empathy.

## 7.2 Wrong political choices

Peter thinks part of the problem is the wrong choices of politicians in a system which is politically homogeneous:

*"We don't make great choices as a nation and our political system is very homogeneous, we don't have enough different voices, and that may lead into bad decisions and also I think Greeks don't really have a big picture mindset, they look at only on what am I going to do today, tomorrow and my son, my cousin, my husband and so forth so I think because we are like that we make political decisions and we voted for people who promised things like that of course, ow yes we will do this, or on more private level some people actually seek out politicians that will promise their cousin a job or promise their husband a job or themselves a job and so we make those, in my opinion stupid choices, and then we don't think about society in general. So I think that's a major problem and I am not very optimistic when it comes to that regarding the Greek people."* (Peter, 89-98)

Respectively, George believes that the state is not interested in creating opportunities for young people:

*"(The state), doesn't create opportunities, I don't think that today I can go out and start a new company with some friends, and have a great future, and the company will go on, even if the company is a very valuable idea, (short pause) it's very hard that this company that I will start, hypothetically, will be, will give me what ever dreamt."* (George, 220-223)

Similarly, Barbara expressed her concern that there is no social policy in Greece, which raises problems both in finding employment and in other aspects of society:

*"But the crisis I think, that because a lot of people when they hear the word crisis they think the economical problems and the problem to find a job and all of these things. I think from the one hand, I am very sad about it and I am a little less optimistic about this thing because I say how the political things are and there is not much social politics in our country, I think, so I am not very optimistic about that." (*Barbara, 249-253)

My participants have lost faith in political parties and the political system while they recognize that the citizens themselves have made a lot of wrong political choices because of deception. In my opinion, it seems that now people do not care so much about politics being disappointing or about the general mindset of the politicians (who care only about being in power). This creates a vicious circle, because when people do not care about their social politics, politicians can make decisions regardless of the will of the people. In addition, I was surprised by the fact that while there are multiple political responsibilities from the governments that have been coordinating economic and social policy all these years, the young educated participants in my study did not place much emphasis on it (e.g. did not talk about politicians, struggles or political upheaval), but instead emphasised their own individual effort to change their future (with more studies, harder work, etc.). This leads me to a conclusion, that there is a devaluation and frustration towards the political scene in the country. Educated young professionals people, unlike previous generations, do not expect change to come from politicians but from individuals and social group efforts. As Barbara states, there is no social policy in Greece and there is no optimism for that.

# Chapter 6

# Discussion

This chapter focuses on discussing the findings presented in the preceding section through the light of theories of existential psychology and the related empirical studies referring to the socio-political crisis in Greece, which was mentioned above in the literature review. Specifically, this study sought to give an existential understanding to the socio-economic crisis, to understand and answer the following research questions:

Primary Question:
What meaning do young Greek professionals make of the Greek financial crisis?

And the sub-questions:

1. What is the impact of the Greek financial crisis on young Greek professionals' daily life?

2. Does the financial crisis affect young Greek professionals' meanings, attitudes, and values in life?

The central purpose of this research is to study the meanings that fuel the lives of young Greek professionals, however, the secondary questions are closely linked to the broader context in which meaning is created both psychologically as well as philosophically. A crisis causes such tension that its negative and positive effects could affect the way one makes sense of their life. Correspondingly, attitudes and values that are shaped by the crisis also play a role in how personal meanings are created. So, I begin this chapter by critically discussing the experiences and views of the participants according to the research questions comparing them with the findings of the studies presented in the literature review.

Then I chose to discuss the findings within two very central theories of existential psychology. That of the four dimensions of existence, and of the four givens of existence (see chapters 2.3.8 and 2.3.9). I believe that discussing the findings in the light of these basic theories offers a deeper understanding of human existence which is limited by external factors, as people are called upon to use their inherent freedom to form values, attitudes, and meanings within the context that comes from the crisis. The tension created between freedom and limitations can contribute to a deeper knowledge of the self, but also to its future formation. I believe that linking the findings to the philosophy of existential thinking is directly relevant to the field of counseling psychology that is called upon to support people in times of crisis. At the end of the chapter, I discuss the limitations of this study, and suggestions for future research. Finally, there are some conclusions drawn from the whole study.

## 6.1 The impact of crisis in Greek families

During the current austerity in Greece we see young educated citizens of the country being tormented by lack of employment. It is easily understood that work is a fundamental right in all societies as it partially provides the right for life itself through remuneration leading to the purchase of goods and services. The research findings have implications for the rest of the western world as within the EU when one country is going through financial difficulty this will affect all of the union. In the present study, I have also seen the impact of the crisis on

meaning-making in life, the positive and negative effects as well as the shaping of attitudes and values. I also studied the dominant emotions of the participants during the crisis as well as discussing their broader social and cultural observations.

It is significant that the people who participated in the research have spent almost all their adult lives in the crisis and three of them experienced the crisis as late teenagers. It is important to note that I observed all participants being supported financially, emotionally or both, by the family, but there are also two cases that present the friction that exists within the family due to the crisis. It is clear that the Greek family supports their children, even when they are adults and even at a stage we would call middle-aged.

It seems that during the years of crisis the families of my participants lived in a way that is familiar to Greece, when it has suffered from various crises (war conflicts, etc.). Survival becomes an absolute goal as state structures that shape the individual but also social security, collapse. We see that human needs cannot be met individually, and people come closer to each other both to share their thoughts and to share material goods and services. In some cases, even three generations live in the same house and share wages and get-togethers. The scene is reminiscent of post-war Greece, which had suffered terrible natural disasters with similar emotional effects. In other words, societies where the unity of the members was taken for granted for survival, they had common goals and the breaking of this cohesion threatened the livelihood of all. Yet another phenomenon that I found in my study is that the family is now child-centered. I observed that the structure of the family is aimed at the growth and prosperity of children. This goal becomes of deeper value to parents who are often anxious about the path of their adult children, involved in their professional development processes, or striving to secure a future and safety even after the parents' death, often even considering it their duty to transfer an asset (property, stocks etc.). As I saw in interviews, some participants feel deeply grateful, while others feel that their crisis and similar attitudes are overloaded with anxiety in a state disproportionate to their age and the course that their life should have taken. I think Greece has never made substantial steps towards emotional but also economic self-sufficiency as a result of various catastrophes from the 400 years of occupation by the Turks, in the first and second world wars, the civil war and then its dictatorship and a modern tendency that has led people to look for work only in the big cities without financial means, thus forcing parents, children and grandchildren often having to share expenses. Unfortunately, prosperity in the late 1990s and early 2000s was phenomenal and brought about by loans which then came to add to the burden of the financial crisis.

## 6.2 A crisis that affects meanings in social, personal and spiritual dimensions of human existence

As mentioned in the literature review, crisis is always a possibility (Van Deurzen, 2009) which reminds people of the fragility of existence. However, crisis needs action that comes from the freedom of people to make conscious choices. In the case of the Greek crisis, people were confronted not only with the risk to their natural security but also with social and personal impacts. In the physical dimension, people have been faced with unemployment and consequently lack of income which creates severe anxiety for the future as it poses serious risks of loss of property (e.g. housing) as well as, of course, the resources necessary for safe living. (e.g. food, travel or medical expenses). My study highlights the lack of self-esteem as participants live mainly through the financial support of their families. In addition, I discern the consequences on social life as the crisis seems to affect this dimension as well. On the one hand, it seems that the interviewees find meaning through their relationships with family members and friends, but in the wider society there is suspicion and often exploitation. For example, Peter, Barbara and Ann experienced criticism of their choices by other people and were often faced with a lack of social support.

Van Deurzen (2009) argues that often people tend to judge others' choices even if they are members of a family or friendly environment. The findings of the study confirm this dimension as many participants spoke of a lack of understanding and critical attitude on the part of parents and friends alike.

However, although there is partly this lack of understanding or anxiety, it seems that the motivation and the outcome are supportive of something that demonstrates family cohesion in difficult times. On a personal level, it seems that the crisis is triggering negative emotions as well as thoughts on identity and self-esteem issues. In my study, it appears that many have sought help through psychotherapy to address these difficulties, or even to develop their self-awareness on issues of failure and disability. On a spiritual level, however, it seems that my participants maintain the values that characterized them as personalities that shape their attitudes towards life. It is very interesting that their values helped them manage deeper and more painful losses. It also seems that their values help them manage their existential space better to finally find what matters in life, which confirms Van Deurzen's (2009) corresponding assertions of spiritual judgment. Additionally, it appears that all participants, although afflicted, have consciously chosen to stay active in an attempt to make sense of the crisis. For example, Barbara, Elizabeth, Effie and Nicole choose education, believing it will open them up to

creative and vocational rehabilitation. Others like Peter, George, Maria and Ann choose to manage the free time and space that unemployment gives them to cultivate their spirit and soul through art, philosophy and their contact with nature while Peter, Barbara, Effie and Ann attend or have attended psychotherapy for self-development.

As mentioned in the literature review, I had much to learn from the four-dimensional theory of existence. As Van Deurzen (2010) has argued, the human body and soul interact with the physical, social, psychological, and spiritual worlds in various ways. In addition, people are looking for security in order to be able to explore their perspectives and take advantage of their freedom in these dimensions. I understand that restrictions such as unemployment often diminish people's sense of freedom. However, freedom can often be manifested through the difficulty people face through the challenge. Personally, I believe that this theory is useful for understanding in depth the existential anguish manifested due to financial crisis limitations, and this is clear for my participants who try to translate them into an existential opportunity for quality life and authenticity.

It seems that the young unemployed graduates in my study are connected to their physical dimension in many different ways. For example, they create meanings through walks in nature, swimming, nearby trips that take advantage of the country's climate and beauty, as well as animal care. It is clear that in this way my participants make sense and manage the consumer or mental constraints imposed by the crisis. The physical dimension reflects our relationship with the physical world and therefore includes all of the above.  It seems that my participants are trying to gain health through these activities and at the same time to gain the strength to accept the physical limitations and limits set by a crisis. The energy of the body as well as the active attitude they choose seem to help them as most interviewees have an active attitude and optimism for the future.

In addition, my participants seem to place particular emphasis on interacting with their social dimension. It is readily apparent from the findings that these young, educated people look for strong relationships that support them and make sense of their day-to-day lives. It seems that when they share their worries or just spend their time with others, they feel they are making sense. On the contrary, they seem to feel bad when some part of their social dimension is missing (e.g. a relationship or friends). As Van Deurzen (2009) claimed, the paradox is that through relationships one better distinguishes one's individuality, as through the ability to interact, offer help and support, one learns about oneself and places oneself within the world. As a result, the individual feels useful or creates other meanings for themselves, and thus builds their self-esteem and identity.

Identity is even better portrayed through my reference to the personal dimension. Many people were confused during the crisis as they lost much of their sense of who they really are. As mentioned, the personal dimension focuses a lot on the memories, experiences, abilities and expectations that one has on oneself. During the crisis, these expectations were tempered by extrinsic factors such as the lack of jobs in society and thus the assessment of competences was distorted. My participants began to constantly enter the process of enhancing their skills and abilities as they believed that what they already possessed was not enough to cope with the competition. In my opinion this has both positives and negatives. The good news is that these young professionals have entered a lifelong learning process and do not rest on the part of knowledge they had already learned, but on overall professional and personal development. On the other hand, the constraints caused by the financial crisis make them constantly feel that they are not enough or good enough. On a psychological level I understand that this can have many consequences. People have a tendency to believe that they control their lives, but uncontrolled situations are stressful and recall the uncertainty that exists. It is up to everyone to realize their deeper personal dimension. When they do, they will learn to exercise their freedom and take responsibility for their decisions even if they come from the pressure of exogenous situations. Difficulties in life are constant and part of human vulnerability and mortality.

Therefore, accepting them can turn these difficulties into existential opportunities that will help one move forward. According to Van Deurzen (2009), there is no reason to take responsibility for everything that happens, as we actually have limited control over the events of life. However, we have a responsibility to ourselves to exercise the freedom given to us to choose through the constraints of situations.

The spiritual dimension includes a person's worldview, their ideas, values and beliefs. This system of values gives the person a sense of what is right and what is wrong, and it allows them to gain the strength to move on with life. In the present study the participants talked extensively about their values. Almost all participants spoke about the fact that their values were not adversely affected by the crisis. On the contrary, they were further strengthened. They talked about values passed on by their family as ideal. Values such as respect for freedom, lack of criticism of one's lifestyle, support for the weak social strata, solidarity and love for fellow human beings were values that were discussed, among others, at the universal level. People create values based on what they believe to be worth living or dying for. In this way they create a spiritual worldview and an internal dialogue that creates meaning and a sense of an ideal world. According to Van Deurzen (2009) people thus faces difficulties as well as possible

emptiness. At this point I would like to add a comment of mine following a social observation of everyday life. It is no coincidence that the findings in the category of values are so homogeneous. I personally believe it is part of the culture of local families, and it is the element that has helped Greeks survive the crisis. Greek families have peculiarities in their cohesion (for example children are slow to become autonomous in their adulthood and that was further aggravated by the financial crisis), yet these values of solidarity have helped people both within families and in wider communities. It also appears from the study's findings that young professionals found a way to survive both financially and in a worthwhile way during a very difficult time. One might argue that these values held by family members interdependently also have negative consequences for the responsibilities as well as giving young professionals a certain sense of freedom. However, that is something that could be explored in a future study.

## 6.3 The givens of existence (death, freedom, meaning, isolation) in the period of crisis

It seems that the participants I spoke to are making active choices in order to exploit their existential freedom and responsibility in response to facing the givens of existence that according to Yalom (1980) are death, freedom, lack of meaning and existential isolation. It is important to clarify at this point, that concepts such as death encapsulates a broader meaning of loss. For example, a major loss for the participants in my study is the difficulty of finding a job as it deprives quality of life such as financial autonomy. In addition, loneliness may be more broadly linked to a lack of understanding and criticism of the social context, or rejection by the employers that triggers feelings of loneliness. The positive thing I noticed is that the participants in my study make use of their freedom and the on-going responsibility they have for themselves to evolve and manage a very difficult time. Yalom (1980) understands that these facts are in the subconscious of all people as they trigger the battle with anxiety through the challenges of life. Participants seem to have accepted them as part of their lives, as they do not refuse to challenge the ways in which they deal with stress. As Greening (1992) points out, these facts constantly pose a number of challenges in everyday life. Among these challenges is the maintenance of a good psychological state that will exclude difficulties in the field of mental health as much as possible. At this point I would like to note that the participants in my study do not explicitly refer to mental problems but do mention various issues arising from the anxiety of unemployment and the anxiety of self-esteem. There were several times I wondered during the analysis whether they were reluctant to share more difficulties with me due to the

research context, or else perhaps their psychotherapy was helping them to manage their emotions so as not to cause serious mental difficulties.

Thus, my findings can also be explained by Yalom's (1980) theory of the givens of existence. According to this theory, people are in constant battle to deal with these four elements (namely loss, meaning, responsibility and isolation) that create tension and anxiety in different parts of life. However, accepting this fact is a challenge that can lead to development and prosperity, as one is trained to manage the intensity of this battle.

Initially I could liken the crisis to loss, and why not death. Heidegger (1979) argued that death is the absolute limitation of the potential of the human soul. Personally, I can see many small deaths in the crisis as the situation brings people face to face with many significant limitations. The most important of these are the basic shortages of survival and mental well-being. Participants in this study report that they found a way to survive physically (through the support provided by the family), but in my understanding shame and anxiety often affected them mentally, while being fed and housed. Therefore, the findings of the study refer to the limitations of goods, the lack of autonomy but also the negative influence of identity and exploitation of young people in the work environment. According to my own perception, but mainly according to the participants' accounts, the intensity of these losses is very strong.

In addition, these limitations can be turned into an opportunity to trace our existential freedom. Yalom (1980) places freedom as the result of the responsibility that each person has for themselves. The fact that there are restrictions and difficulties does not mean that freedom is lost. The research findings show that participants make use of this freedom with many adjustments to their daily lives. These young professionals are finding ways to make choices, review their priorities and reflect on the situation. They appear to be taking the responsibility and the right they have towards themselves to be active in coping with the difficulties (Van Deurzen, 2011). My participants, therefore, see the positive effect of the crisis as having learned to prioritize, find space for personal reflection, and be open to exploring new relationships. Yalom (1980) said that responsibility towards the self, though it contains pain, is what creates destiny.

Yalom (1980) also spoke of meaning as a given of existence and the pain caused by its loss. People need meaning. Although meaning for each person is personal, in this study I have categorized many of them so as to have a concise picture that led me to some conclusions and interpretations. So, it seems that my participants are creating meaning through additional studies, art, philosophy, psychotherapy, nature and relationships. My view is in line with that

of Yalom (1980), that the exercise of freedom and choice as well as the reflection and acceptance of limiting factors ultimately lead to the creation of meanings and purposes.

Finally, my study shows isolation as existential. My participants are not isolated from relationships (I think the opposite is true). However, they feel isolated from the state which excludes them from professional opportunities, thereby creating problems of self-esteem and in the sense of a stable identity. I could liken the government to a parent who does not care for their child to develop in a society where the lack of meaningful care for the citizen prevails, depriving them of the right to work and produce.

## 6.4 The effects of financial crisis on personal attitudes

As mentioned in the literature review, attitudes usually contain a positive or negative tendency (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998, as cited in Hewstone, Stroebe & Jonas, 2012). In this study, I observed a positive trend in attitudes. All of the participants refer to hope, optimism and the right of citizens to overcome the crisis and to live in their homeland, that is, the place they consider their environment. They also talked about the fact that they have accepted or are in the process of accepting the difficulty of the situation, knowing that life contains such difficult times. There have been times when I wondered if this attitude comes from the fact that all participants are academically literate people and whether the findings would be different if different participant criteria were used, which of course cannot be verified here and would necessitate another study. I also wondered if their composure and positive attitude stemmed from the fact that they came from families that could support them or if they were simply people who grew up in the crisis from an early age and had started to adapt and accept the situation. From the dialogue I had with them, I think all three of these things were true. Attitudes as well as their values seem to have remained stable and many of them have been shaped both by the family and the wider social environment as well as by life itself and its difficulties. The participants themselves stated that their attitudes and values remain stable and strengthened as time goes on. As mentioned in the theoretical part of this study, concepts such as "freedom" and "ideology", though abstract, are often guided by the attitudes a person has in their life. It is clear that Bohner's views (2001, as cited in Hewstone, Stroebe & Jonas, 2012) are consistent with the content of most interviews. Attitudes of hope, optimism and the right of a person to remain in their home country seem to determine both their choices and their feelings and ideologies.

## 6.5 The Impact of financial crisis on values

Interesting findings also emerged in the field of values. As I have mentioned in my literature review, by the term values I mean the deeper attitudes of life that usually come from a combination of learning, experience, personality and social influence. As all of the participants report, values are the product of family upbringing that the individual carries with them for a lifetime. As one participant typically said, "in times of crisis, values are the only thing that I really possess." We note that the values reported by the participants are homogeneous. First of all, everyone said that their values remained stable or strengthened over the years. Secondly, I saw that their values are of a humanitarian nature. Values such as respect for the freedom of others, voluntary humanitarian assistance, love, appreciation for the family and those who supported their existence during these difficult years are some of those mentioned.

On the other hand, it was argued by some that while they are living and acting on their own values, they observe a subsiding of values in their wider social environment. This shows, on the one hand, their belief that values are something "common" or similar to their own (as they interpret them through this prism), and on the other hand, through this logic, they extricate themselves from what prevails socially. Here I think my participants' frustration with the wider society is evident as it seems at times threatening or unwilling to support their needs. It is very interesting that all of the participants stated that their values remained unchanged while some of them observed and were disappointed by the negative values of others. I think this is where people's expectation of a society of solidarity and support seems that, in many cases, does not exist or cannot be revealed in the prevailing situation of the crisis.

## 6.6 Dominant emotions that emerged from the study

Another striking observation lies in the emotions as I saw that while there is anxiety, fear for the future in terms of survival, and frustration and sadness, significantly, anger is lacking. Simultaneously, this anger manifests in wider society and seems to be expressed by the rise of the political far-right that has demonstrated extreme violence on the streets and promises punishment to the politicians responsible for having brought the crisis to Greece.

I wondered whether anger was not expressed in these interviews because participants were ashamed of it (thinking probably that it is a bad emotion) or whether it has receded over the years, or whether the participants' educational level and the majority who have had contact

with psychotherapy helped them manage it. I also wondered if frustration and fatigue are the feelings that lead to the reduction of anger. I seriously wonder if this reduction and the partial acceptance of the situation as a phenomenon is also expressed through the fact of abstaining from political life, as it was rarely mentioned in interviews. At this point I would like to add that as a phenomenological researcher I had no expectations about the findings. However, the findings made me wonder from the perspective of a citizen and my observation of my professional role as a psychologist.

## 6.7 The positive effects of the financial crisis

As can be seen from the findings through interviews, the crisis was an opportunity for many participants to change. First of all, it can be seen that these young professionals have gained the ability to prioritize their spending. Of course, living needs are first, but without neglecting the need for education or letting off steam through entertainment. It seems that my educated and unemployed participants are now looking for affordable and fun opportunities in training and entertainment. Society had to find a way to adapt to it, and many organizations and businesses began to offer such opportunities. All participants show that they have begun to revise their priorities, defining what is necessary or important for themselves, and leaving behind what is unnecessary or is of inferior quality. However, it should be noted here again that this generation has become quite used to this way of thinking as it has had to live much of its adolescent or even childhood years under these circumstances. In other words, we could say that it has managed to harmonize its needs with exogenous financial constraints. So, limiting anything that is superfluous is not a compromise but a deeper acceptance and choice of more substantive processes. Such processes are the strengthening of human relations.

It can be seen from the findings that all the participants deeply value personal relationships of love and friendship, whether family or friends. They are adopting different ways of entertainment that, while not costing them anything, at the same time brings them closer to their loved ones. It seems that a stroll by the sea, or a meeting in the square or at home playing games and having discussions are capable of overcoming the lack of money. My participants developed the ability to borrow or share their goods with others, thus avoiding over-consumption and at the same time creating a more ecological spirit than older generations. In addition, engaging young people in walks, travel, and animal care are laying the foundations for a more active life, which we hope will have a positive impact as such an attitude reduces sedentary life. While unemployment as a result of the economic crisis seems to be related to

less healthy habits and perhaps accompanied by mental disorders, I found that the participants maintain an optimistic attitude and are not discouraged about their social and internal processes. For example, I can see that several participants stated that they use the free time that the crisis provides them both to train more and to reflect internally.

On the one hand, many are anxious to exploit these skills in a productive process such as work, but at the same time claim that they enjoy and even extend this knowledge to other objects, while wasting time thinking about innovative ideas and ways to develop themselves. In other words, we could say that we observe a trend and effort of young educated people to try to break away from the trivial and utilize knowledge and new trends and technologies to succeed in life. Some of them like Peter, George, Maria and Effie are also thinking of expanding their contacts abroad while most say they do not want to leave Greece. Here I would like to point out that it was very important for Greece to remain in the European Union as it enables young people to be educated, to be active and to move much more easily and economically across borders into much more robust financial states, or states with more favorable taxation.

## 6.8 The role of psychotherapy during the years of financial crisis

Finally, I would like to discuss the points regarding psychotherapy, since this is particularly relevant to a doctorate in counselling psychology. I was particularly impressed that four participants have visited or continue to visit a therapist for individual or group sessions. It seems that psychotherapy is slowly penetrating Greek culture through the younger generation who sees it not only as a means of supporting patients (as it was in the past) but as a process of supporting and developing skills, but also developing the whole self. In the majority of interviews, psychotherapy is presented as an opportunity for personal development and to support an active attitude that every person has the right and the duty to maintain for themselves. My questions related to psychotherapy usually arose as part of the semi-structured interview after the participants referred to it, without being in the original plan of the interview. I have to admit that I was impressed by the extensive reporting, but the fact that the participants visited a psychologist's office for their interview may also have played an important role as they might have felt the need to refer to their psychotherapeutic experiences.

However, several participants reported their financial difficulty in seeking the psychotherapeutic services they would like or the fact that financial difficulties even made their relationship with the therapist difficult. At this point it can be seen, unfortunately, that the

scourge of unemployment even affects the provision of mental health support as the opportunity for public mental health structures is not yet part of Greek culture. These benefits are mainly short-term but also targeted at people with mental illnesses or disorders, not just people looking for support and personal development.

## 6.9 Other social consequences

Some participants (such as George and Effie) reported, albeit not in detail, that public health benefits were inadequate due to a shortage of labour and/or medical supplies. Although I have been told that they trust the medical staff and employees who do what they can to stand together, the structures seem to be unable to support the increased need for support as it seems that people are increasingly turning to free public support and hospitalization as they have no money for private care benefits. Although not all participants spoke about the issues of public health service structures (perhaps because of their young age they have not had to face health problems), the words of those who shared such experiences appear to confirm the findings of Simou and Koutsogiorgou (2014) and Kentikelenis et al., (2011), who showed that people in crisis prefer public health structures rather than private ones, as they cannot support private benefits and private insurance.

This is something I can confirm myself as I have worked in public and private organizations. Unfortunately, in the area of mental health, things are even worse as the system is unable to meet the increased needs of citizens, and patients are forced to either wait in waiting lists or be satisfied with specific and short-term benefits. As Kolaitis and Giannakopoulos (2015) report, mental health professionals are increasingly confronted with a growing number of patients and families experiencing psychosocial difficulties, while many community organizations (most of them taking on vulnerable groups such as children) were closed from 2012 and after because of insufficient resources. Initially as a specialized psychologist in private mental health centres but also as a private psychologist, with a humanitarian approach, I devoted several hours to low-cost or even free therapies to serve people who were unable to pay. This of course was something that many professionals of all disciplines did. Although it is not officially listed, I think that quite a lot of people have experienced a similar story of volunteering and giving. Participants' interviews record various experiences of solidarity with or by fellow human beings.

The same is true for the field of education. Although I did not find any research showing what the tendency to choose public and private education was during the financial crisis, all

participants attended undergraduate or postgraduate studies at public universities as their costs were significantly lower. Only one participant studied abroad (but still in public universities while working there).

An important element that emerges in this study, which shows the financial difficulty these young professionals, is the fact that although adults, they continue to live with their parents. Seven of the eight participants stated or implied during the discussion that they were staying at their parents' homes, often without being able to contribute to the costs. As Matsagani (2013) writes, this was a phenomenon that happened more in the past for cultural reasons, but not at this rate.

In addition, almost all participants spoke about their predominant emotions during the crisis and about what they observed in their family members, and in the wider environment of people affected by unemployment. Although most had an optimistic attitude in claiming their human right to overcome the crisis, they spoke extensively about anxiety, frustration, shame, suspicion, jealousy, feelings that are intense and lasting. We see the tendency noted by Drydakis (2015) in his study to be verified here, as participants stated that these feelings were more intense during the period of unemployment compared to before. However, this study has no data to verify whether or not the physical health of the unemployed has deteriorated.

On the topic of occupational rehabilitation, I noticed a tendency of participants to worry about prospects for business innovation, or freelancing. This also shows a general trend in Greece as mentioned in Matsagani's (2013) research. The percentage of freelancers in Greece is one-third of the workers and is the largest in Europe. It seems that young professionals are keeping their eyes open in this direction as they cannot work in companies or their employers hire them on difficult terms and low wages. Of course, tax laws and resource shortages make it difficult to become an entrepreneur, but it is useful to see this tendency verified in the study, even if only in the form of reflection. In this way I observed the thinking that drives young unemployed professionals to start a new business.

Another issue that troubled me in the literature review was whether in the midst of the crisis, the rich became richer or the poor poorer. Matsaganis (2013) seems to have verified at least the second hypothesis. This study was not designed to answer this question, but participants' experiences led me to think that business people are trying to maintain the highest possible profit by reducing the salaries of new employees or reducing their workforce in general. On the one hand, I thought that one factor in this development was the inability of businesses to pay their employees, but on the other hand, participants recounted experiences

that make them skeptical about this. In short, they thought that someone wanted to exploit them for that person's benefit.

The design of this research does not allow me to speak in percentages, but I think the conclusions are useful to ponder or prompt other studies in the future, as although Greece has been hit by the financial crisis for over ten years, published studies on all these key concerns are still scarce particularly phenomenological ones that focus on lived experience such as the current study.

## 6.10 Implications for counselling psychology

The psychological impact of unemployment on people is just short of devastating for some, while a chance for further personal, academic and professional development for others. This research presents some of the ways in which young unemployed and educated Greek citizens think, how they deal with unemployment and how they manage to find meaning in it. This study, conducted by a counselling psychologist, links existential thinking to the effects of youth unemployment in a highly university-educated population by providing information that could help counselling psychologists understand the way this group thinks and feels so that they can find effective ways to help them, particularly, since according to my findings, young professionals seem to show confidence in attending counselling and psychotherapy services.

This study could trigger a productive debate in the field of counselling psychology as it seeks to understand how a sample of young unemployed professionals create and explore meaning. This knowledge may be a trigger for further research on whether these meanings (or the way they are created) are effective in finding a job or whether finding a job (with or without meaning) is key for a young person to find wealth.

We live in a time when counselling psychologists in Greece are called on more than ever to advise their clients on issues related to finding a job and the relationship between work and survival and prosperity. Work is a very important aspect of self-image and its loss evokes a multitude of emotions (sometimes clear but sometimes confused). In addition, I believe that existential thinking, and the assimilation of existential concepts can help experts to negotiate these issues, as unemployment is related to loss, meaning, and the responsibility that people have towards themselves and their choices (regardless of the human constraints set by social contexts per historical period), and the loneliness that symbolizes the sense and relationship

with oneself outside others and within others. All of the above are concepts intertwined with the existential field in psychotherapy and counselling psychology. All experts should be prepared to talk about such issues if needed. Unfortunately, the cognitive-behavioral model prevails in most western societies as it is cost-effective and is taught in most modern universities. However, the existential model can be a source of inspiration either for specialization in it or for enriching the knowledge for every psychologist.

# Chapter 7

# Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to the examination of one's beliefs, judgements, and practices during the research process and how these might have influenced the research (Finlay, 1998). One of the goals of reflexivity is to ensure the credibility of the findings by reducing the researcher's chances of influencing the study. In addition, reflexivity can help researchers realize that their own experiences can contribute to the research as long as there is proper transparency and awareness (Willig, 2008).

As mentioned, this idiographic study focuses on the individual and emphasizes on the unique personal experience of human nature. It is a study that has allowed an in-depth understanding of the individual experience without the use of generalizations or assumptions on the part of the researcher. However, I would like to make some comments that impressed me as a therapist and researcher. It is essential that I note my observations as part of the double-hermeneutic, because as a researcher I play a role in analyzing and interpreting the phenomena described by the participants. So, I chose to intuitively explore some concepts by trying to see a deeper interpretation through the descriptions that were said (or not said).

First of all, it is essential to point out that during the course of the research, I belonged to the age group of the participants. I was able to understand and relate to many of their experiences and emotions. However, I worked hard to learn how to open the phenomenological debate without involving myself, while still being exploratory and scientifically curious about the flow of the discussion. At the same time, I was very careful to provide empathy and a supportive attitude. Although I was in the age group of the participants and could understand and identify with many of their experiences, in their eyes I was a professional psychologist as the interviews took place in my office. I kept in mind that this could trigger mixed feelings as

they assumed that I had a job and that I might be in better financial shape than them. That was an issue that made me feel uncomfortable when organizing the interviewing procedure and had to work on it both in my research supervision and my personal therapy. My supervisors and therapist helped me understand what made me feel uncomfortable, and it was the possibility that the participants might not realise how much empathy I feel about the difficulties of young people my age despite the fact that I had managed to move forward professionally. I was living in financial crisis and I was coping with difficulties, which I overcame to some extent, and I felt I wanted to help other people continue to have hope and work to live their lives with fulfillment. It was also my role as a psychologist and the fact that I work daily with people who are trying to overcome difficulties or become stronger to live the life they want. I feel that I was confused with my multiple roles as a psychologist and researcher. Etherington (2004) refers to the fact that the researcher is called to challenge their knowledge, their beliefs but also their feelings, and to maintain their research attitude in the interview process in order to serve the research process focus on the participants' world rather than on the researcher's bias or preconceptions.

 I believe that I took care that they did not feel uncomfortable, both through my physical presence and the extremely quiet atmosphere in the office. As a result, I feel that I succeeded, as the initial embarrassment of some was eliminated in the course of the discussion. Indeed, many have told me that one of the reasons that led them to participate was the similar anxiety they had about finding participants for their own undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Here I see another sign of solidarity and perhaps identification of their feelings. My experience as a psychologist helped me in the interview process as I have knowledge on how to co-construct a discussion by providing the necessary space and time that a person needs to express their thoughts and opinions. Also, my therapeutic attitude as an existential therapist promotes equality and minimizing power differentials between people engaging in a discussion. I believe that those therapeutic skills played an important role in the smooth flow of the interviews which were conducted without any problems.

The way the participants created meaning touched me deeply as it reminded me of my own ways of struggling with meaning, as well as identifying a homogeneity that initially puzzled me, which I explained in detail in the discussion section as well as future research suggestions. I wondered if this homogeneity and common similarities were the result of circumstances such as education, the financial situation of the wider family environment, or the fact that they all lived in the capital city. As a result, I wondered many times whether educated young people in the provinces create similar meanings or whether the same is true of

young people who are destitute and have no financial support from their families. I also wondered if the same is true of young people with no university education. With these questions I want to highlight that there are various factors that may influence the way people create or share meaning, or even acquire attitudes and values that in turn influence the way they create meaning. So in my study, those young educated people told me that they make sense through additional studies, art (I include philosophy as some talked about the art of reading, and the strong relationship of reading with art and the spiritual dimension). Participants also shared with me the fact that they make sense of their time with other people by nurturing family and friendships or even developing their relationship with the environment by getting to know it more deeply by taking walks, short trips or caring for and watching animals and the environment. Most also shared the fact that psychotherapy (which was not a criterion for participation in this research) helped them create meaning through processes such as self-awareness and self-development.

I would also like to note how I felt that the way they described meaning making is deeply connected to both their life attitudes and their values. I think that the attitude of lifelong learning and development, the relationship with art and the environment are in line with attitudes such as optimism, deep faith in the right to overcome difficulties, and acceptance of a situation that must be overcome with courage and patience, respecting the freedom of fellow human beings and showing solidarity. This is my deepest connection but I think there is a connection that may be due to the education of these people or even to the interpretation of phenomena as a result of the culture that comes from families or the combination of education, family and the fact that although these people were seriously affected by the crisis, at the same time the impact had not yet reached the point of threatening basic necessities such as food and shelter. I would like to emphasize that the above are my own assumptions coming from my own experiences observing the phenomenon of the crisis and the environment, as a human, psychologist and academic.

In terms of emotions, educated young Greek graduates shared with me the feelings of anxiety, frustration and shame despite the optimistic attitude mentioned earlier. This was a topic that touched me deeply in the way they described it. I think the need for autonomy in these productive ages during a person's life is very important. I remember how I felt pressured when I needed to ask my family for help in completing my postgraduate studies. However, I think my empathy helped the participants to share exactly how they felt while some of them also talked about the feelings of suspicion and envy that they sometimes feel themselves but also in the wider community.

What impressed me as I was studying the findings is that the participants (except one) did not explicitly mention the political dimensions of the crisis. Most have mentioned that the government does not provide welfare or development services, but at the same time they showed me that this is something they have accepted. I could not understand whether they scorned the present political system as unable to help them or if they have not formed a political consciousness. Observing the world (during the course of the research), I felt that both of the above assertions were true. People felt helpless and deceived by the government. They were trying to survive through their own strength and that of their families, but also through solidarity with each other. At the same time, however, this acceptance of the government's inability or weakness to provide high quality social services pushed them further and further away from the knowledge and development of a political consciousness. This was also evident through the abstention in all the electoral processes of that period, which reached close to 50% (Varoufakis, 2017). So, while it seems that the crisis has affected the majority of citizens in one way or another, and while it is said that the political choices are wrong, I do not see any further delving into this issue.

The findings are useful for psychologists, other social scientists and health scientists as they present a sample of young unemployed professionals' personal experiences using an accepted research methodology. The results as mentioned above are homogeneous and despite the small sample size, this still carries some weight. Meaning making is very important in the pursuit of a good quality of life, as well as shaping attitudes and maintaining or updating values with authenticity. As a mental health scientist, I was intrigued with the statistics presented which gave a picture of the situation. The existential theories of the givens of existence but also of the four dimensions as in combination with the findings can guide us to understand the need for a multidimensional life with meaning. Taking advantage of freedom, and assuming our responsibilities to create meaning, to meditate on loneliness, and to work many times through the limitations presented as existence is beset by uncertainty and difficulties. From this study I felt that I became more conscious of the concepts of loss, freedom, meaning and isolation. It is important to remember that the lack of the ability to work is not only restrictive, but also isolating. However, in this study, I can see that the participants take responsibility that derives from their freedom to create better conditions for themselves and society.

## 7.1 Surprising findings under a reflective perspective

In the following paragraphs I would like to refer to some points of the study which surprised me and concern different stages of the research. For example, I was impressed by the fact that very few men registered for the study (only 2 out of 8). Women continued to get in touch even when recruitment was completed while no other men did. As I have written elsewhere in this thesis, I can hypothesize some reasons why this happened, as from my experience I have noticed that men find it difficult to share feelings related to unemployment and their difficulty finding work in periods of crisis. In Greece, people are still in a post-patriarchal period where, while there is obviously a guaranteed equality of the two sexes in practice, stereotypes from the older generations prevail. Stereotypes such as the man should make more money than the woman, or the expectation of society that the man should work and provide financially at home, while the woman does not have the corresponding position. Consequently, I imagine it is not so easy for men to share their feelings related to unemployment. Respectively, I imagine that the fact that the invitation was made by a doctoral researcher who has a professional occupation may have played a role. In general, these signs may seem expected in Greek society, but I was surprised to see them happen in practice in a sample of young highly educated people.

Another point that surprised me is the fact that the majority of participants did not want to participate in the "brain drain" wave that prevailed in the country at that time. Although educated at a high level, they did not see emigration as a good solution. This surprised me as more than half a million graduates had already left the country to pursue professions related to their academic knowledge.

A third surprising point was the trend for lifelong learning. Most of the participants continued to be trained in postgraduate or vocational programs with resources usually coming from their families. This shows a belief in education in terms of career opportunities. However, training in such programs costs money and people here do not seem to have a clear plan for the fact that additional studies may not offer them a job in Greece. So it seems that this attitude comes again from the beliefs of the older generations in Greece, who did everything to give their children an academic education (both for their social status and for a real job) because they did not have one themselves.

At this point I would like to mention again that Greece of the past centuries was a tormented state whose citizens suffered from the hardships of foreign occupation, wars, civil wars and a dictatorial regime that often did not give citizens a choice to study. I think that the parents and grandparents of today's generation were repressed by this lack of education which they generously offered to their children. Finally I notice an optimism in the thinking of

unemployed young people which is not so much based on facts (and I wonder again if it is a matter of culture as we live in a sunny country with environmentally favorable conditions), or as a defence to be able to cover feelings of anger or shame (which are mentioned in the interviews). I personally felt during the interviews that both happened. Some seemed quite frightened while coming to optimistic conclusions while others had an optimistic attitude from the beginning (without being based on their data and experiences). I just feel that some people felt safe as they were surrounded by supportive families, which probably holds out hope that a solution will be found in the end, while others were looking for a way to move forward or maybe show a defence against the situation or even the researcher (as they were talking to a man who had a job).

At this point I would like to comment on another important aspect of research in terms of reflective experience. It is logical that my findings were based on what was said verbally by the participants and can sufficiently substantiate the creation of common themes, even if they have gone through the process of double interpretation. As an active researcher in my study, I make decisions and choose based on scientific and personal criteria on what will be given weight.

However, it is important to note, even briefly, my own feelings and experiences through what was not said but felt through interviews. I think that collectively there was an anger in the tone of voice of some participants, while in others I could see an angry look as they talked about the deprivations they have suffered in material goods and services or pleasant experiences (travel, hobbies, etc.). I also felt some of them hurt as if they wanted to tell me that "we are not to blame for what is happening to us, but we are called to overcome it". I could see the pain of injustice in their eyes, but they did not know where to throw the responsibilities. There were also moments when I could see that they wanted to include me more intensely in the discussion, as if they wanted to hear the opinion of a psychologist about everything I experienced and about how I will overcome it.

I also felt from some that they participated in order to express the burden they carry and maybe I could help them feel better. However, I collectively felt that they felt safe in the process and that they treated me as a person who could understand what they are experiencing through my role but mainly through my attitude. One of the things I was afraid of before I started the data collection process was that some people might feel embarrassed or ugly as even though I was in the same age group I had managed to find employment within my area of studies. However, I did not feel that way (which of course does not mean that it did not exist), and my role certainly did not seem to hinder the collection of data but instead facilitated it.

# Chapter 8

# Limitations, Suggestions and Conclusion

## 8.1 Limitations of this IPA study

In the following lines I would like to deal with the limitations and challenges of phenomenological research and consequently this study. While there are many elements that make a phenomenological study useful, there are some disadvantages that apply to this study:

### 1) Language barrier

In interpretive phenomenological analysis (and in qualitative research in general) the tool of data collection is the language that provides participants with the opportunity to express and record their experiences, and in this study their meanings, attitudes and values. According to Willig (2008), the correct use of language that can be easily understood is also part of the validity. In this study English was not the first language of the participants. As such, I found it more difficult and time consuming to access the experiential worlds of the participants. However, I was lucky because my sample was educated young people who used English well enough. The level of English was also a criterion for participation. To further confirm the validity of the research, I conducted a pilot study with data collection and analysis and found that although neither the researcher nor the participant had English as their mother tongue, the interviews went smoothly without much difficulty. Also, the opportunity I gave to the participants to ask or fill in their sentences with Greek words (if they had difficulty) removed part of the anxiety of the participants who used this opportunity. I think that because I was engaged with the interview process I did not have difficulty in the interpretation process at the analysis stage, however I cannot be sure how much more effective the interviews and the data would be if the interviews were in Greek.

For example, I do not know if the participants would have expressed more complex or deeper meanings or would have justified their answers more or in a different way. This was my original plan, but it was not accepted by the ethics committee as the research is doctoral level and I had to show my knowledge in the analysis. If the interviews were conducted in Greek, the same would have to be done with the analysis and then everything would have to have been

translated into English. In this way the procedures of the analysis would not be clear, which would be a different constraint. So, although I believe that interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was the appropriate methodology for this type of study, perhaps the use of the mother tongue of the participants and the researcher would have shown some different aspects that were not revealed here due to this limitation. A corresponding study using Greek would be interesting and is something I am thinking of doing on the occasion of the pandemic crisis and its effects.

### 2) Generalisability

Smaller sample sizes inevitably raise questions about representativeness and the possibility of generalizing the results to a wider population. However, the goal of IPA is not to generalize but to explore participants' experiences in greater depth, which is a preferable process to a shallow and merely descriptive analysis of many individuals in studies like this that explore meaning (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011, as cited in Noon, 2018). As Noon (2018) notes, this does not mean that IPA is opposed to general claims, as the results of this study can be combined with others that have been done in the past or will be done in the future, and all together make more general claims. Moreover, in this particular research, all participants live in the capital of the country. This was something that bothered me, as educated young people who chose or were forced to live in the countryside were likely to express different interesting views on meaning, life attitudes and values. Unfortunately, the in-depth content of the research and the English language prevented me from using other media that would help us collect data from other areas. At this point I should note that recruitment was open to anyone living outside the capital if they wished to participate, but that did not happen probably because of the travel costs. Moreover, online skype or zoom interviews were not a possibility.

### 3) Uncomfortable dualism

Researchers working with IPA are faced with a dualistic tension between idiographic commitment and the search for connections between cases (Noon, 2018). This means that the emphasis on the common experiences of the participants (through which the themes emerge) can lead to the concealment of individual differences or characteristics. In IPA it is not possible to export a theme from an individual point of view. Thus, in studies such as this one, involving four to eight people, the researcher should include excerpts of at least three - four people to substantiate the creation of a theme (Noon, 2018). This means that individual details or

interesting individual points of view may not be emphasized (even if they have been chosen to present them as different), and cannot substantiate the creation of a theme. This issue becomes even more difficult when I wanted to present my research at the Middlesex University conference and I was given 15 minutes. That is where I had to go through the process of choosing the important ones. So there is the discomfort of the researcher having to choose what is important to be presented and what is not and how this does not fit the individual views but only the categorized ones, that is, the common ones given by many participants. The same thing happens when you choose to publish articles with a certain word limit in a journal. Finally, there was a lack of previous empirical research in order to get a better understanding of the situation in Greece on a human level.

## 8.2 Suggestions for future research

It would be very interesting to do phenomenological studies that give voice to different social groups living in the impact of the crisis. This is after all one of the main aims of existential-phenomenological studies that refer to psychology and its significance and interpretative meaning. In addition, it would be interesting to see similar studies using a wider number of participants, using for example a semi-quantitative or quantitative methodology using questionnaires with rating scales. Additionally, the partial homogeneity and content common to the answers about meanings, attitudes, values, but even the negative and positive aspects of the crisis often made me wonder if it is the result of sample homogeneity (with factors such as age and high education) or other factors such as the place of residence or the financial status of the wider family and the social circle. Even though unemployed they indicate that they also survive through the financial support of their families who, in one way or another, find a way to support them. It seems that these families do not belong to a very low socio-economic stratum. It would be interesting if some conclusions could drawn by studying different groups, such as graduates who live in the countryside, homeless graduates or young professionals who don't have a university degree respectively.

## 8.3 Conclusions

### 8.3.1 Conclusions on psychological and social aspects

Undoubtedly, the economic crisis is a major challenge for Greek society. Unfortunately, the social and political system has been largely unable to support citizens in the areas of work, education and health, but the findings of this research show that there is also a proportion of young people who have learnt to adapt to a life in crisis and are ready to turn the crisis into an existential opportunity and a foundation for a better future. Education as a priority, solidarity and support-based family relationships as well as an active attitude against passivity and misery are optimistic elements. Life can be difficult, and most people do not welcome pain, yet here it can be seen that a random sample of eight educated young professionals with strong values and dreams, who despite struggling with unpleasant emotions, continue to struggle for a better future. It remains to be seen whether the positive sides will be exploited both individually and mainly socially through a supportive government framework that will give more impetus and opportunities to the productive part of the population.

## 8.3.2 Conclusions on the contributions of this study to the field of psychology

I believe that the present study enables psychologists to understand the lived experience and views of unemployed and educated young professionals who lived in Greece during the ten-year crisis. In their dialogues from which the findings of the research emerged, useful information was found about the way they chose to explore or create meaning in their lives during these difficult years, as well as the attitudes and values with which they chose to act as a point of reference with themselves and their authenticity. This work was intended from the beginning to concern counselling psychologists on how existential psychology and phenomenology can approach the exploration of meaning in this particular social group which seems to seek this contribution of psychotherapy in its life with the aim of personal development and prosperity.

I hope my study will introduce counselling psychologists of other psychotherapeutic modalities through useful existential concepts such as the search for meaning, authenticity, freedom, the responsibility someone has to choose for one's life, regardless of the limitations imposed by society, while they are called to find the courage to overcome them. In this work I have linked various existential theories with the economic crisis in Greece. These theories are useful and can be included in reflections on other types of crises as life is full of difficulties that people are called upon to overcome. Psychologists can ponder and seek more information about the practice of existential psychotherapy, while they can prepare themselves without prejudice for the possibility of working with age groups who have difficulty redefining or

finding meanings and purposes in their lives due to conditions such as crises. Where sometimes everything seems in vain due to limitations, existential psychology empowers people to accept their suffering as human and pushes them to regain their right to life through philosophy and the real human healing connection.

As a psychologist and existential therapist with ten years of experience, I constantly find the relief that clients  feel when they become familiar with the concepts of existential psychology that help people recognize that difficulties are part of life, are accepted and universal, and even exist within them. Their next step will be even a little freedom, to choose consciously and with the corresponding responsibility. For the already specialized counselling psychologists who work through the prism of existential thinking and psychotherapy, I hope this study will be another reason for existential reflection, as the age we live in is plagued by financial and health crises and we must maintain resilience to evolve and improve the mental health services offered, while constantly discovering ways to inspire and help people highlight their potential and live a life in tune with their needs and authentic selves.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Research forms

Forms

### Information sheet

Psychology Department
Middlesex University
Hendon
London NW4 4BT

NSPC Ltd
Existential Academy
61-63 Fortune Green Road
London NW6 1DR
UK

Researcher's name: Dionysios Sourelis (and date)

Study title: A search for meaning during financial crisis: An interpretative phenomenological study of the experiences of highly educated and unemployed Greek young professionals.

Invitation paragraph You are being invited to take part in a research study because you fulfil our research criteria (highly educated person, using fluent English, currently unemployed for more than 12 months, between the age of twenty-five and thirty-five years old, never been married and without children). Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the following information carefully, and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take your time to decide whether you wish to take part.

 What is the purpose of the research?  The aim of the study is to explore the individual meanings, values, and attitudes of Greek highly educated and currently unemployed professionals who are living through the current socio-economic crisis.

What will happen to me if I take part? We will be conducting interviews between February 2018 and June 2018. Over the next days Mr. Dionysios Sourelis will contact you by telephone to ask you if you would like to take part and, if so, ask you a few questions about yourself to make sure you meet the criteria. Normally, the interviews are not expected to last more than ninety minutes and will take place at my professional private office at a date and time that is convenient to you. Two digital voice recorders will be used to record our conversation about your experiences.

<u>What are the possible disadvantages to taking part?</u> There are no real disadvantages of taking part in this study although some people may find talking about their personal experiences distressing. If so, please let me know, and if you wish, I will stop the interview. Although this is very unlikely, should you tell me something that I am required by law to pass on to a third person, I will have to do so. Otherwise whatever you tell me will be confidential.

<u>What are the possible advantages of taking part?</u> There is no intended benefit/advantage to the participant from taking part in the study. However, some people may find it an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and could find this beneficial.

<u>Consent</u> A copy of the information sheet will be given to you to take home and before the interview you will have time to ask the researcher any questions you may need to fill in any gaps in your understanding about the nature of the research and your participation in it.  You will then be asked to sign a written consent form which the researcher will go through with you to ensure you have understood its contents.  Participation in this research is entirely voluntary.  You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you decide to take part you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

<u>Who is organising and funding the research?</u>  This project is not funded by any organisation. It is organised by the researcher under the guidance of his academic supervisors and institutions (NSPC & Middlesex University) in fulfilment of the requirements for a Doctorate in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy by professional studies.

<u>What will happen to the data?</u> Your data will be transcribed and analysed by the researcher, with the possible help of a hired professional in  the phase of transcription and translation (when needed). So the researcher will not use your full, or last name in the interview and any other hired assistants involved will not know who you are. Your original recordings will be destroyed immediately upon transcription and the data will be anonymised, all identifying features taken out and you will be given a pseudonym.  Your data will be given a code and kept separately and stored either on an encrypted memory stick or stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's own home.  Only the researcher will have access to your data.  Your anonymised data may be used in future publications.  All paper copies of your data will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act and will be destroyed six months after researcher's graduation and will be treated as confidential. If the research is published the researcher will make sure that neither your name or other indentifying details are used. Additionally the participant has the right to withdraw from the project at any time. In such case, all recorded and transcribed data will be destroyed immediately and will not be used at all.

<u>Who has reviewed the study?</u> All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The Middlesex Psychology Department's Ethics Committee have reviewed this proposal.

<u>Concluding section</u>  Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet.  If you have any other questions about the study we would be very happy to answer them. Please contact the researcher, Mr Dionysios Sourelis by telephone on (+30) 695 5167123 or  by email to DS904@live.mdx.ac.uk If you would like to contact the supervisory team please email Dr. Patricia Bonnici at pbonnici@gmail.com or by telephone at +44207 435 8067 or +44203 515 0223.

**Informed consent**

## Written Informed Consent

Title of study: A search for meaning during financial crisis: An interpretative phenomenological study of  highly educated and unemployed Greek Young Professionals.
Year: 2017-2018
Researcher's name:      Dionysios Sourelis
Supervisor's name and email: *Dr. Patricia Bonnici (email: pbonnici@gmail.com)*

- I have understood the details of the research as explained to me verbally and in writing by the researcher, and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.

- I have been given contact details for the researcher in the information sheet which I can take home.

- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will  be anonymised. The researcher will remove all the personally identifiable information.

- I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so. All recorded and transcribed data will be destroyed immediately after withdrawal from the study and this data will not be used in such cases.

- I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication, and I provide my consent that this may occur.

_____                    _____
Print name                                          Sign Name

date: _____

**To the participant:** Data may be inspected by the Chair of the Psychology Ethics panel and the Chair of the School of Health and Education Ethics committee of Middlesex University, if required by institutional audits about the correctness of procedures. Although this would happen in strict confidentiality, please tick here if you do not wish your data to be included in audits: _____

**Debriefing**

Psychology Department
Middlesex University
Hendon
London NW4 4BT

NSPC Ltd
Existential Academy
61-63 Fortune Green Road
London NW6 1DR
UK

Researcher's name: Mr. Dionysios Sourelis Email: DS904@live.mdx.ac.uk
NSPC Ltd, Existential Academy, 61-63 Fortune Green Road, London NW6 1DR, UK

Supervisor's name: Dr. Patricia Bonnici Email: pbonnici@gmail.com
NSPC Ltd, Existential Academy, 61-63 Fortune Green Road, London NW6 1DR, UK

Study title: A search for meaning during financial crisis: An interpretative phenomenological study of highly educated and unemployed Greek young professionals.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research project and for making a valuable contribution to our knowledge about highly educated and currently unemployed Greek youth who are living though the current socio-economic crisis. The research and your contribution to it is important as it seeks to deepen our understanding of the impact the socio-economic crisis is having on Greek youths and how this is affecting their experiences, meanings and values in life.

The digital recording of our interview will now be transcribed by the researcher and his academic assistant whereupon it will be immediately destroyed. In the transcription, all identifying features will be removed and you will be given a pseudonym. The findings will be written up as part of a DCPsych Dissertation. The findings may also be published in peer-reviewed journals, or other academic publications and/or be presented in academic conferences. If you would like to withdraw from the study, you can do so at any time by contacting the researcher. Your anonymised data will be stored on an encrypted memory stick which only the research team will have access to. Paper copies will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's own home. All data will be destroyed six months after researcher's graduation (approximately in two years).

If personal issues have been raised or you feel affected by taking part in this study and you would like to speak to an independent professional mental health service you are advised to seek help from :

Hellenic centre of Mental Health and Research:

Metsovou 33 & Notara, 10683, Athens

Tel. : +30 210 8213300, +30 210 8212944

email: hcmhrsm@otenet.gr

The Samaritans – Hellenic Red Cross:

Tel: + 30 2105248132

I hope you have understood the overall aim and purpose of this study and enjoyed your participation in it. Should you be left with any areas of doubt or confusion as to your participation or have any queries regarding the research, please feel free to contact me by email at: DS904@live.mdx.ac.uk . If you have any concerns or would like to make a complaint you can contact my supervisor by email at pbonnici@gmail.com. If you would like to receive a copy of the summary research findings you can do so by contacting the researcher.

Date:

## Appendix 2: Interview questions plan

Interview Questions

1. What is your experience of living in Greece right now?

2. Since you have graduated, have you been working?
   a. Prompts: a) If yes, what jobs, have you been doing? For how long did they last?
   b. b) if yes, how is it for you to work in this job? c) Do you take advantage of your qualifications and degrees?  If no, how is it for you being unemployed?

3. What sense do you make of the current situation?
   a. Prompts: What role (if any) does play the financial crisis in your way of finding meaning?

4. Where do you find/create meaning in life? Prompts: What role (if any) does play the crisis in your way of finding meaning?

5. Does the current situation affect the way you live your life?
   a. Prompts: Personal, Social, family life, relationships, hobbies, etc.

6. Does the current situation affect your values and attitudes in life?
   a. Prompts: (If yes) Can you describe the way they are affected?  How is that for you? (If no) what is your experience of keeping your attitudes and values unaffected? How is that for you?

7. Has anything positive come out of the current situation for you?

8. Is there anything else that you would like to add that we haven't discussed so far?

## Appendix 3: Interview transcript sample

Transcript

1   Ok, so welcome to our research, you have already been informed about the procedure, yes,

2   and about your participation to this research so, do you have anything to ask before we start

3   or, no I think I am ok, ok. So can you tell me please your age?

4   I am 32 going to 33 now.

5   So what is your experience of living in Greece right now?

6   In terms of what's specifically?

7   Let's say open, ok openly.

8   How I feel right now living in Greece. It's not very pleasant experience of course financially.

9   The crisis has made it very difficult to find work and that means that I have limited resources

10  and that usually means that I can't do all the things that I used to enjoy, I can't really go out

11  with friends as much, I can't maybe buy the things that I like, or spend some money on

12  entertainment let's say so I have to be very resourceful with what I find, so I have to make

13  sure that what I do doesn't cost much or you know I have to rush on it, I have to say ok, I can

14  go to the cinema once per month or you know do things like that , so that's the financial

15  aspect of it. Politically (pause), I am not so sure at the moment, I haven't been very social for

16  one thing, I think one thing that is happened since I 've been unemployed is that I have

17  isolated myself a bit more which might be tying to the financial aspect of it too. Some people

18  have actually isolated themselves from me because I don't have as much money anymore, so

19  you know I am not fun anymore, I can't go to this restaurant, or do this, or , they have

20  isolated , I should say , they have distanced themselves from me or just completely stopped

21  contact. (Pause) And I just generally right now struggling to find what my next step is and

22  what my purpose is so to speak, it was easier when I had the carved out career, and I said ok

23  this is just the line that I am following and didn't really think about it. Now, after being

24  unemployed, I have to face myself and ask truly what am I doing, who am I , where do I want

25  to go, and what is meaningful to me, what is livable, because those two things have to co-

26  exist and (pause) I find myself on the one hand thinking this is a good thing that I have open

27  options in terms of my direction but on the other hand I am thinking, I am a little (short

28  pause) defeated by the fact that I still haven't been able to find a job so it's those two things

29  clashing , ok , yeah , something like a contradiction, yeah ok , I have opportunities I can

30  redefine myself and my life but on the other hand it's aww ok this is kind of desperate and

31  not so you know pleasant, not so hope giving. So it's yeah, it's a little contradictory maybe,

32  yeah but it seems that you work on it, I mean it's seems that you are really aware of all your

33  time to be aware of what happened, yes yeah , I do and I am trying yeah.

34  Ok, since you have graduated, have you been working?

35  No I am not. I was working, (short pause) well I was working while I was studying in my

36  case since it was a doctoral position so when I stopped, I stopped both and I wasn't able to

37  find something yeah.

38  Ok, so you said that you didn't really take advantage? (big pause)

39  Can we pause?

40  So if I understood you didn't really take advantage of your qualifications and degrees until

41  now, yes, right?

42  Yes that's true. Until (short pause), well I mean not until after I studied, which was also my

43  job , the doctoral degree, I have not found a job that was something relevant first of all to

44  what I was doing and also it wasn't anything that was really long term or in good position or

45  something that gave me financial security or maybe feel like ok , this good turn it into career.

46  It was mostly just very small opportunities through maybe someone I knew but didn't end up

47  working out. And usually the reason given was, ow you know it's the crisis, we don't have

48  enough money, we can't sustain this position or something like that.

49  So it was low pay then, yes yeah but also like I said not just low pay but the fact that it

50  usually didn't last, it was just something that might have be gone but didn't really, work.

51  So how do you feel about this? I mean you told me before that you have bachelors degree, a

52  masters degree, also you speak English fluently, so you have a lot of qualifications, so how

53  do you feel that you can't really take advantage of what you have done until now.

54  It's definitely frustrating but not just externally but also internally and what I mean is of

55  course does the part of the fact that I can say, ok Greece doesn't actually have jobs that

56  reflect my qualifications completely equally so saying , ok yes we need exactly someone who

57  studied this and this and this and we will pay you well that doesn't exist but also it's

58  frustrating from an internal place because I find myself in this weird position right now where

59  the things that I studied, I no longer want to do. So I am in this position where the things that

60  I studied, I mostly don't want to practice as a living and things that I might want to practice

61  as a living I haven't studied. So I am in a very difficult position in that regard that's also

62    internal struggle. But yeah, starting from the easiest, so to speak, aspect of it is that there is no

63    direct position for most part for me for something that will reflect a first job after a degree. So

64    if we are not talking academic, because academically I could possibly continue with another

65    PhD and maybe go on forth but if I am looking for something in the industry, in Greece

66    especially , I don't see positions for example for interaction designer which is what I would

67    be or a UX designer as they call it. They usually want somebody with years and years of

68    experience which I do not have, so not that many junior positions for what I am doing, yes, or

69    for somebody who maybe is looking for more academic, yeah, positions.

70    So there is also a difficulty of finding junior positions to what you have already studied,

71    exactly yes, and this makes you feel, how to say it, unsure or?

72    Yes, yeah , it makes me feel like there is no space maybe for what I have done or it's not

73    appreciated maybe let's say, ok, in the Greek sector and then if I want to do something that

74    has to do more with my bachelors let's say which is mostly computers science and

75    programming , it's something that I haven't worked with hands on since my degree so that's

76    also difficult. So basically I have to go back to school on my own in order to catch up with

77    the technology and remember and because all those years I have been working towards an

78    academic career and that's something that I found out very sadly is that academia doesn't

79    prepare you for anything else other than academia. So the skills that I have are not so desired

80    let's say by most, yeah  employers here in Greece, yeah.

81    Ok. (Short pause) Let's go back a bit to the current situation in Greece and what sense do you

82    make of this current situation, how do you experience of what happens out this period.

83    What sense? That's a good question. (Pause) It's quite, I can say that it was expected on one

84    hand, it was leading to that place and that's not just to do with Greece of course , it's a

85    financial, global phenomenon that led to this but maybe we are struck more by it because we

86    are a small country and we don't have the resources that other countries might have to gain

87    back traction with work, with financial issues, but I also think it might be a bit of a political

88    problem locally. From my experience you know obviously not being that old but from the

89    years that I have experienced Greek politics we don't make great choices as a nation and our

90    political system is very homogeneous, we don't have enough different voices, and that may

91    lead into bad decisions and also I think Greeks don't really have a big picture mindset, they

92    look at only on what am I going to do today , tomorrow and my son, my cousin, my husband

93    and so forth so I think because we are like that we make political decisions and we voted for

94  people who promised things like that of course, ow yes we will do this, or on more private
95  level some people actually seek out politicians that will promise their cousin a job or promise
96  their husband a job or themselves a job and so we make those , in my opinion stupid choices,
97  and then we don't think about society in general. So I think that's a major problem and I am
98  not very optimistic when it comes to that regarding the Greek people. I haven't seen a change
99  much over time.

100 How do you feel as a young professional and as a young Greek citizen about this
101 phenomenon?

102 I have always had a strange relationship with it , in terms of , I want to love Greece as a
103 nation more but like you said, especially as a young professional, I feel like its slapping me in
104 the face and it's telling me, I don't care about you and I don't care about finding the right job
105 for you or making sure that you have a place in society and in the workplace, so it's very
106 difficult especially being over 30 right now, that's another difficult part because younger
107 people have more positions open to them, I find that there is a strange ageism so to speak
108 with the jobs that if you are over 30 or over 35 maybe then it starts being really difficult
109 trying to find a new job unless you have years and years of experience on something. So, I
110 am facing that difficulty right now because I am in a path where like I said I have to either
111 start from a very basic job that has nothing to do with my degrees or I have to go into a job
112 that has to do with my degrees but again I have to catch up and try to find junior positions
113 and so forth.

114 So, what role does play the financial crisis or no, the current situation as you experienced it in
115 your way of finding meaning, if there is any role.

116 Yes, yeah. That is a good question, I think it definitely plays into it of course. It's not the sole
117 source of my meaning, in my case , I never define myself only from what I did as a
118 profession for example but I think for any person , it's a huge part of their life, work gives us
119 some meaning and especially if we think of it as a career, which I used to think of it as in my
120 academic course, it gave me meaning in a sense of , ok this is what I do, this is my path and
121 now that is gone so, the way that the crisis acts in this case it has sort of pressed the reset
122 button for me. And now I have to struggle more for it because I no longer have an external
123 label , let's say, because that's easy right, when you go to a party for example , what's the
124 first question somebody asks, what do you do, that's how most of us define ourselves, I am a
125 psychologist, I am this and that, so now what do I say , I am unemployed? How is that define

126    me? It doesn't and it does, it's weird because, on my mind of course it doesn't because
127    unemployment is a negative state as a non state of work but on the other hand it also defines
128    me because it describes the challenge I am going through. And socially you know at least
129    until recently it used to be kind of stigma to be unemployed you know so what's wrong with
130    you but now I think that more people are getting unemployed because of the crisis so maybe
131    there is more leniency maybe there is more , ow ok I get it, it's because of the crisis, so it's an
132    interesting thing to look at, how the number of unemployed people has influenced how
133    people look at it. Because if you ask that question ten years ago, it wouldn't be the same I
134    think. People would say, ow what's wrong with you, why are you unemployed, ow of course
135    you are unemployed. Stigma was more intense. Yes, yeah, it was more intense but also the
136    way that I remember it was also so much easier to find a job. That's how I recall it. I spent
137    times when I would leave some job and just be, ow look ok, its fine, in a month I will find
138    another a job, and I did. But now it's not like that.

139    How do you feel now that you share these common situations with other people in your age?

140    It's (pause), it's a good question. I don't know how I feel exactly about it. I find it comforting
141    on one hand that I am not the only one of course but on the other hand also it makes me really
142    sad because I think of how many people like me are going through this, and I don't want that.
143    I don't know if this is just my character but I have never been very competitive in the sense
144    of thinking, ow he gets a job , I don't get one , I think that there is room in general for
145    everyone but so I don't want people to be unemployed. It's not good for the economy, it's not
146    good psychologically for them I think. So yeah, it's a bit of both. It's comforting on one hand
147    but I don't want this to last.

148    So where do you find or how do you create meaning in life under these circumstances?

149    Yeah. Right now I would say the primary way that I create meaning, if we are talking outside
150    myself for a second, is psychotherapy. That's a very basic thing for me, because I need to
151    know who I am, I need to be ok with myself working my relationships and that's a very basic
152    part of it for me. Beyond psychotherapy, I find meaning a lot in philosophy, in reading about
153    both psilosophical, psychological issues and concepts. So yes, philosophy definitely is
154    something that I've always found soulless in a way, it's something that calms me and then in
155    my case I also try to create. I try to create whether it's music, whether it's something else and
156    that's also part of my seeking a job maybe that could involve some creativity. I am not sure
157    about it yet but I try to create because it helps me and because I think it gives life meaning as

158  well. The combination of philosophy, creativity and then psychotherapy I think it gives me a

159  good web let's say of meaning. Yeah, and I try to combine all of them in some way because I

160  think again, job yes, our work is important but if we rely on it too much, then we lose sight of

161  who we are without that. So, that's why I said , it's very interesting thing that the first thing

162  we ask in parties is maybe , what do you do, instead of saying , hey what are your interests

163  you know or what , like you said , like you just asked me now, what gives your life meaning.

164  Wouldn't that be a better question? I think it would but yes so that's another thing is , I am

165  trying to be ok for now with not having that external meaning or that external label and then

166  the other thing that I think it might be positive about this experience is that when I do get a

167  job or when I do maybe start creating a career, I will no longer let it be as definitive as before.

168  So it will not be such a great part of my identity as it may used to be.

169  So it seems that crisis somehow played a role, sure, in order to develop yourself, yes, or

170  develop new interests?

171  Yeah. Not necessarily new interests but searching and looking within and like I said it's kinda

172  like a reset button because if I just stop one job and then straight jump to the next, I wouldn't

173  have really, had the time or been forced let's say to think about all these things. Because with

174  unemployment (laughs sarcastically) comes a lot of free time, right? So my character at least

175  when I have a lot of free time I think a lot which is not always good (laughs) but it helps me

176  maybe examine some things that I would not have otherwise.

177  Yeah, you know, that was my next question. I mean how crisis, what was the role of crisis in

178  this kind of development that you describe. I mean, the psychological development or? Yeah,

179  both psychologically and practically.

180  Ow ok. (Short pause) Again maybe like I mentioned before it's that it's a bit of a paradox

181  because it's both negative and positive event. The negative part is that of course I am a little

182  discouraged and I am trying to get over that but positive part is that to use a common

183  expression, when you hit rock bottom let's say, then there is only going up, right? So that's

184  how I am trying to think of it and now I have reached this place because that's the first time

185  in my life I have been unemployed more than six months. So, now that I have reached that

186  point, it's a new thing for me but also it's an opportunity and that's why I actually like

187  etymology a lot and the word crisis is judgement as well so now it's time for me to judge

188  myself and know who am I, what can I do , what can I not do, and yeah, that's a positive

189  aspect of it. It's allowing me maybe to redefine myself whereas if I was in a very stable

190    financial environment and might just had another job, yeah maybe I would not have the

191    difficulties I have now but my evolution maybe would have been slower or of a different

192    kind, I think.

193    Ok, let's expand the discussion a bit more with some prompts like the personal life, the social

194    life, the family life, you know the relationships, and in these terms, does the current situation

195    affect the way that you live your life?

196    Yes. Absolutely. Like I mentioned in the very beginning you know especially the social life

197    part of it because whether you realize it or not, money is quite important. Having money to

198    go out and get a drink even get coffee, go to a movie, go to a restaurant, all those things that

199    maybe one day were given now are not and I have to think about each one of them. Ok do I

200    have the money to do this, and it has definitely affected my social life I think because not

201    everybody is understanding unless they are going through the same thing. So let's say , you

202    know maybe , a friend of mine who does have money might understand me, it's ok just come

203    over to my place, or you know I will pay this time , or something like that , but another friend

204    or maybe somebody who I thought it was a friend might say , ow you know it's ok nevermind

205    just start not even asking me if I want to go somewhere because they know I don't have

206    money. So yeah, I would say it's definitely given it a hit in again, when we are talking into

207    social, if we are talking about deep friendships I would say that hasn't really changed. The

208    people that were good friends have remained good friends for the most part and again if

209    anything it's a chance to discover deeper friendships because of this because again when you

210    are at the point when you are not very fun because you don't have money you find out who

211    your true friends are. So I think that's been one of the positive aspects of this for me. But of

212    course it's also hurt when people I thought as friends turn out not to be so yeah. And then,

213    you also asked for familial relationships, yeah. (Pause) Yeah, that one. I would say, yeah, that

214    one has also been affected because there is more maybe friction between me and my parents

215    for example, now if I need some help or if I have to ask for something that requires money or

216    you know, do we have the resources for this. It makes familial relationships at least close

217    family, like parents, I don't have siblings so I don't know what that's like but with my

218    parents, it's definitely lots of friction I think. And there is also the aspect of me be at least for

219    one of them not understanding, while I am unemployed so I would say for example that my

220    father does understand and he is more supportive or as my mother thinks that it's just because

221    I don't have enough drive or will or what you want to say so I think she neglects the financial

222    environment or the workplace environment in Greece right now because she hasn't really

223     been in contact with the workplace since I was born so I think that's a major reason why. She

224     thinks that it's the same as when she was out which is not the case because even for someone

225     who is as young as I am like I said, 10 years ago I found jobs easily and now I can't. So the

226     reality of it is very different, yeah.

227     How is it for you, when they talk on others, the important others, like the good friends or

228     family members etc. that don't really understand how you feel or how the situation is. You

229     know, I was thinking about that because you talked about your mother and I don't know but I

230     think that what I am thinking is that your mother was working in another period of time.

231     Exactly. When the things were different from now. So I suppose that there is a gap.

232     Ow yes. Absolutely. But when I actually try to explain that she denies it. I actually

233     understand that she comes from a different time especially regarding work but she doesn't see

234     it really. This part has to do with her character as well because I think she is what we call a

235     blind optimistic(laughs) so you know she is a person who thinks, everything we find without

236     putting much thought into it, but yeah it does feel disappointing and maybe even hurtful when

237     friends don't understand or a parent doesn't understand, especially knowing that I've tried

238     quite a lot and knowing the reality not just from myself but with other people I have spoken

239     to who are in similar position maybe, so yeah. I think more support would help me during

240     this time but I don't have enough of it from family.

241     So yeah , I think that's a good point to speak about more about values and attitudes so does

242     the current situation in Greece affect actually your values and attitudes in life and how if yes

243     and how is that for you and if no what is your experience of keeping your values and attitudes

244     unaffected. So I ask this from different points of view.

245     Yes, you might have to help me a bit with what you mean about values and attitudes because

246     it's so large as a question and I don't know where to start. Maybe give me an example or?

247     I think that you told some things before about how people relate to each other according to,

248     you said that, that your friends for example remain friends you know, this is in my mind this

249     is a value.

250     Ok, ok.

251     Attitudes is how, what I experience with this word, I don't know if it's the same for you but I

252     tell this in order to help you more. Attitude for example is how you behave towards other

253     people. In reality, this is a combination of values, yeah.

254 Yeah, ok I think I am certain to understand. Hasn't changed, I am trying to think of it as, I
255 would probably say maybe it has strengthened some values or confirmed even but not
256 changed, no I don't think so. That might also have to do as well, with the fact that I was never
257 really what someone would call rich so even during a time that Greece was not going through
258 crisis my family might have. If that makes sense. Yes, as a child I grew up in what you might
259 call middle class environment but in my case my parents separated when I was still teenager
260 and so when my father left the house, things were quite difficult financially from then. So
261 basically ever since I have been an adult I have known what's like to struggle to one degree
262 or another financially. And especially when I went abroad, first to England and then to
263 Sweden it was never easy, except maybe for Sweden and the last years because that was a
264 real , you know, job. But when I was studying it was very difficult financially, yes. So I think
265 that might be part of why my values not changed, but I think that some of them have been
266 strengthened because now the crisis is more extreme I would say. So, whatever I was going
267 through before now is much more of that and I think because you mentioned and I think you
268 are right , that behavior and value intertwine, I find that maybe now my behavior reflects my
269 values more immediately, more openly, because there is no, if we are talking about friends
270 for example, there is no false web of entertainment or money to cover other things so now
271 that the true values that I have are more obvious to others and that sometimes causes
272 disagreement and clashes, sometimes it causes friendships to become stronger and I think
273 also in my case at least because of the fact that I don't have as much money that I found more
274 people that I can relate to online for example because I live a lot of my interaction through
275 that and I find similar people in terms of mindset and values online even in Greece but in
276 another city for example or from another country completely and yeah I think that how it has
277 changed, that it's not so much of it has changed my values but my values are now more
278 obvious and stronger maybe. Because again I don't have work to distract me or you know,
279 maybe impose things on me and I don't have money to entertain myself in a way that I don't
280 have to really think about those things as I said before when I have a lot of free time I think a
281 lot which is not always great (laughs sarcastically) but it can help maybe in self awareness.

282 So how do you feel inside that your attitudes and values are somehow unaffected of this
283 situation. How you feel about this?

284 I don't really have strong feelings about it , maybe like I said because I kind of expected this
285 to happen socially perhaps I am not as shocked, the only , yeah , I mean it feels (pause) I
286 guess it feels good to know that I can say I have integrity of character maybe but I don't see it

287   as something that is extraordinary, it's part of who I am and the crisis has affected me like I

288   said socially maybe or has affected other parts but I think for a crisis to change your character

289   would have to be something that is very tied to finance or work so if somebody for example

290   ties their values to their work , yes , I can see that but I never did as much. So my values were

291   just my values and then I did my work, of course according to those values. But I think I

292   never took them from off work if that makes sense. Because there are some people who think

293   like that , you know, I don't know , let's say social workers who believe and helping people

294   and so forth but there are people who just say I believe on that either way, whether I am a car

295   repairman or this. So yeah, I think that was part of it.

296   Ok so, I heard a lot of things and you know I have an opinion about, let's say it differently, I

297   have heard a lot of positive sides but I don't only want to stay on my opinion, I want to ask

298   you directly. Has anything positive come out of the current situation for you?

299   (short pause). Again some things, ok just talking about the positives, I have been able to I

300   think  allow myself some time to redefine both myself and where I am going , like you said ,

301   what my meaning is, you know, try to find those things so yeah that is a positive aspect is that

302   even though it means that I don't have work helping me make meaning, I can make meaning

303   in other ways and I have more time for that. Of course the negative aspect of that is that

304   sometimes it doesn't help my mood so if my mood is not great then I can't do many of those

305   things but I try to maintain a healthy balance as much as I can. So that's one positive thing

306   and then again, I keep saying positive and negative but it is (laughs) both so the other thing is

307   that it's made me look at people in a more realistic light so now I can see more who my

308   friends are and who my friends are not and that hurts of course losing someone who thought

309   as your friend but at the same time it's a good feeling of, ok I have a clearer image of who the

310   people in my life are, so those two things are I think, the first finding self and direction in life

311   and meaning, and then having clearer social relationships and closer relationships.

312   Previously, you refer to psychotherapy, to be honest I didn't include this question in my

313   agenda but I think it's a good opportunity to ask you if psychotherapy actually does play a

314   role on how you experience all these things that you have described before. Not only about

315   the positive side.

316   Yes, yeah I would say it does, yes, because I can't, ok I should mention that I have been

317   doing some form of psychotherapy for, I am trying to be exact here, almost ten years I think

318   now on and off. So before the crisis, yes yes, a little bit before the crisis yes, not too long but

319  a little bit before the crisis and, so the reason I mentioned that is because I can't think of

320  myself without therapy right now. So most of the things that I have understood about myself

321  and I have worked on are a direct result of therapy. Of course it's also what I do outside of

322  therapy but that's an extension of it so in terms of my experience with therapy in the past, yes

323  it plays a huge role. Right now though , I wouldn't say so because the current form of therapy

324  that I am engaged in is not helping me a lot, I am right now in this group for psychotherapy

325  and I think that it's a strange mix of homogeneous but also very different. What do I mean by

326  that is, this group, almost all of us are unemployed, but at the same time we are very very

327  different people. So not only you know maybe what someone would call our symptoms or

328  our characters, but also our walks of life, age, things like that so it's a strange combination of

329  ???need/me??? , because on the one hand, it discourages me when I go there, because I see

330  (laughs) everybody being miserable, if that makes sense, I just see desperation and it doesn't

331  help me and then the other problem is that I can't really voice my problems because the

332  people in this psychotherapy group are so different to me that again this might be my

333  interpretation but I think they don't have the same concerns that I have.  If that makes sense.

334  So the way that I did psychotherapy before because that's another thing, some of them it's

335  their first time there whereas others are more experienced so the way that psychotherapy

336  happens is very different to what I am used to and. So right now, I am not been helped a lot

337  and it's a thing that I am working on but the crude experience that I have behind me of

338  psychotherapy I think is helping me in a way. Yeah.

339  Was the crisis a reason that you changed the form of psychotherapy that was helpful for you

340  before?

341  Exactly. Absolutely. It was mainly because of money, so that's one of the reasons. I had to

342  quit the therapist I was seeing because we had reached the point where there couldn't be any

343  reduction made to the price and at that time it was a matter of survival so after that I tried to

344  find alternatives and then I did see someone at the public sector for free which is something

345  by the way that I still think of a positive in the crisis is, at least we have some coverage for

346  health things, even for some psychotherapeutic help not as great I don't think.  But I think it's

347  a positive about Greece as a nation in general, so maybe we have our crisis but we have a

348  basic coverage for people so I think that's good. But that parenthesis aside, the therapist

349  opted that I should not continue with individual therapy, so she put me in a group. It was not

350  my choice. So I think that might also be the problem. I don't know if it's because I am not

351  ready, or if it's my character or something else but it's not really working for me, yeah. So

352   the crisis was definitely the reason why now I have a form of therapy I don't find very

353   helpful.

354   Ok. So is there anything else that you would like to add or we haven't discussed so far or you

355   feel the need to express towards that, the thing that we discussed.

356   (Short pause). Hmm maybe it's more of a general comment, I am not sure if it's relevant, it's

357   not necessarily having to do with meaning maybe but because we spoke about social

358   relationships, one thing that I found that's maybe very sad is that with some exceptions,

359   because there are some good things happening, but mostly I find that crisis has not brought us

360   closer if anything it's kind of brought us apart as a society not friends exactly, as a society I

361   think we are worse than before. That's my impression of it, so I don't think we really have

362   become empathetic or helpful or come closer or local communities or things like that, I don't

363   see that very much. For me I think it's made people a bit more angry , cruel if anything and I

364   find that very sad so I think the way to start getting out of it is to actually change our attitudes

365   first of all, since we talked about attitudes and values. So I think, having a larger conception

366   of society, say ok it's not just about me or my brother, it's about all of us, I think we need that

367   more. I am not again very optimistic (laughs) when I think of that but I think we need more of

368   that.

369   Yeah I definitely agree with you, I think, sometimes, I am thinking if this is a cultural thing

370   or

371   Yes, yes. I wonder too. Because you know, Greece has this reputation of, ow yes are so about

372   family and friends but I think that might also be the problem. Because you see, I don't know

373   how to express this but for example, something that impressed me about Sweden, with many

374   negatives that it has by the way, I am not complimenting it as perfect country, but something

375   that impressed me about Sweden is they have a very good ethic when it comes to, ok this is

376   good for everyone, so even just an example of a person, he said look I don't have a child but I

377   will still pay all the taxes that are necessary for playgrounds and swings and schools because

378   they are important to the society. That mindset is better even for financial development, this

379   is better, let alone you know social or psychological but, I think it's part of our problem that

380   we do not look at the forest, we only look at the tree.

381   Even if they make us pay a lot of taxes for the common good, for the good of everyone, I

382   think you talk about the attitude, how we perceive the…

383   Yes, we perceive it as it's not my problem and I think that's awful. To be fair though, I also

384   think that there is a president for greeks thinking like that, because the government usually

385   does not deliver. So in Sweden, they know, yes I will pay my taxes but then I will get this and

386   this and this. Here we don't have that (laughs). So it's a bad lack of trust I think between

387   government and people and that's also a huge problem. So I am not saying that, I know the

388   solution, because I don't, but I know that first there is a problem of perception of, you know,

389   it's for all of us, and then it's also a problem of lack of trust in the government and vice versa.

390   Thank you very much for your participation. The discussion was very thoughtful.

391   I am glad, it was very good for me too.

392   I hope the best for you in the future.

393   Thank you.

394   And again thank you very much. Just to know that I am going to stop officially the recording

395   right now but we can discuss a bit as a part of the debriefing procedure about how you can be

396   informed about the outcomes of the research. If you are of course interested in them or if you

397   feel somehow, after the procedure, we can discuss.

398   Ok

## Appendix 4: Example tables of analytic process

An example of the Analysis Process

Table : A sample of the basic table of analysis for each participant

| Emergent Themes | Original Transcript | Explanatory Comments |
|---|---|---|
| | I: Ok, so welcome to our research, you have already been informed about the procedure,<br><br>P: Yes.<br><br>I: and about your participation to this research so, do you have anything to ask before we start or,<br><br>P: no I think I am ok,<br><br>I: ok. So can you tell me please your age?<br><br>P: I am 32 going to 33 now. | |
| Unpleasant experience | I: So what is your experience of living in Greece right now?<br><br>P: In terms of what's specifically? | It seemed that the participant wasn't sure of how to answer this question. |
| Difficulty finding job<br><br>Limited resources<br><br>Limitations in spending on enjoyable activities<br><br>Limitations in spending on social activities | I: Let's say open…<br><br>P: Ok openly. How I feel right now living in Greece. It's not very pleasant experience of course financially. The crisis has made it very difficult to find work and that means that I have limited resources and that usually means that I | Financially it is not a pleasant experience. Difficulty of finding work means limited resources. Thus, unable of doing things that he used to enjoy like going out as much with friends, buying things, or spend much money to entertainment. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Limitations in spending on entertainment

Limitations in spending on buying goodies

Money/resources management | can't do all the things that I used to enjoy, I can't really go out with friends as much, I can't maybe buy the things that I like, or spend some money on entertainment let's say so I have to be very resourceful with what I find, so I have to make sure that what I do doesn't cost much | Selective and thoughtful use of money. |
| | or you know I have to rush | |
| Social isolation from the others

Social isolation from the self | on it, I have to say ok, I can go to the cinema once per month or you know do things like that, so that's the financial aspect of it. | He is not sure of his experience in political terms because of his isolation. |
| | Politically (pause), I am not so sure at the moment, I haven't been very social for one thing, I think one thing that is happened since I've | He feels that some others have isolated themselves from him because of his inability to spend money on activities like before and as a |
| Unemployment affects purpose

Difficulty for finding purpose

Uncertainty (where I want to go)

Unemployment affects self identity | been unemployed is that I have isolated myself a bit more which might be tying to the financial aspect of it too. Some people have actually isolated themselves from me because I don't have as much money | result he is not "fun". |
| | anymore, so you know I am not fun anymore, I can't go to this restaurant, or do this, or , they have isolated, I | Some people of his social environment even stopped their contact completely. Then a small pause where he seemed "reflective or even broody". Struggling to find |
| Personal meaning | | |
| Unemployment opens options | should say, they have distanced themselves from me or just completely | the next step and purpose. He didn't think things like this when he was following a career. Unemployment made |
| Sense of defeat | stopped contact. (Pause) And I just generally right | him face himself and ask existential questions about the self ("what am I doing", |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Inner contradictions | now struggling to find what my next step is and what my purpose is so to speak, it was easier when I had the carved out career, and I said ok this is just the line that I am following and didn't really think about it. Now, after being unemployed, I have to face myself and ask truly what am I doing, who am I, where do I want to go, and what is meaningful to me, what is livable, because those two things have to co-exist and (pause) I find myself on the one hand thinking this is a good thing that I have open options in terms of my direction but on the other hand I am thinking, I am a little (short pause) defeated by the fact that I still haven't been able to find a job so it's those two things clashing, ok, yeah, something like a contradiction, yeah ok, I have opportunities I can redefine myself and my life but on the other hand it's aww ok this is kind of desperate and not so you know pleasant, not so hope giving. So it's yeah, it's a little contradictory maybe, yeah but it seems that you work on it, I mean it's seems | "who I am", "where do I want to go", "what is meaningful to me", "what is livable"). |
| Awareness on emotions<br><br>Awareness on time<br><br>Awareness of what happens | | Two things coexist: 1) the unemployment brought an opportunity to open options after thinking, 2) he feels defeated because he hasn't yet find a job. He describes it as a "contradiction"<br><br>He speaks about the "awareness", as an outcome of the reflective procedure. It seems that he tries to work on the issues that came from that awareness. |

| | that you are really aware of all your time to be aware of what happened, yes yeah, I do and I am trying yeah.<br><br>I: Ok, since you have graduated, have you been working? | |
| --- | --- | --- |

Table 2: A sample of my list with the emergent themes, while I was trying to find similarities

| Participant 000 | Particip. 001 | Particip. 002 | Particip. 003 | Particip. 004 | Particip. 005 | Particip. 006 | Particip. 007 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grown up in Greece | Unpleasant experience | There are people who are still happy | Happy with her achievements during the crisis | She likes her life in Greece | Not noticed any difference in the first three years of crisis due to young age | Trying to cope with the difficult situation | Couldn't go somewhere else than Greece |
| Life in Greece is difficult | Difficulty for finding job | No money | Not happy about her social relationships | Doesn't think of leaving Greece | Things changed dramatically in family over the years | Finding ways to survive and make the dreams come true | Searching for a job |
| Parent cannot help financially | Limited resources | People can't pay their bills | Trying to find meaning concerning the job, relationships and family | Doing masters postgraduate studies | Couldn't afford to study in another city | Volunteer work | Good experiences in Greece |
| Unable to buy what he wants | Limitations in spending on enjoyable activities | People cannot support their children | People have become selfish | Finding a job is difficult | Crisis affected her studies and doing them via distance | Further studies abroad | It was better before but its ok now |
| Unable to do whatever he wants Can't go to vacation | Limitations in spending on social activities | Complicated situation | People have no empathy in their relationships | Difficult to feel that you have done so many studies | Excited when had gas for the car | Learning more things, rather than stay without | Graduated 3 years ago |

| | | | | and have no job. | | developm ent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Meanings, Negative Impacts, Emotions, Social Observations Attitudes