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Youth purpose during the great recession: A mixed-methods study

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ABSTRACT

Although research reveals purpose can buffer youth from negative states in other contexts, little is known about how youth with purpose function amidst significant economic challenges. This sequential explanatory mixed-methods study, conducted with a sample of Greek youth during the Great Recession, sought to determine (1) if the presence of purpose buffered youth from the potentially demoralizing effects of the economic crisis, and if so, (2) how it managed to do so. Survey results suggest youth with high purpose scores were resilient enough to look past the present challenges and envision a positive future. Qualitative findings suggest youth with purpose remained hopeful about the future by focusing on commitments to their friends, families, communities, and country, and at times, by tuning out the negative economic news. Implications of these findings for positive youth development are discussed.

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Purpose; meaning; adolescents; resilience; globalization; positive youth development

Following the 2008–09 global economic slowdown, economists around the world have begun to question the promise of globalization (Ghemawat, 2017). Despite this, national economies continue to become increasingly interconnected, making globalization a reality, at least for the foreseeable future. Therefore, understanding how this new reality influences youth development is an important aim. In fact, leading developmental scholars have recently called for increased attention to this issue (Sherrod, 2017). As a means of learning more about this expansive topic, the present study sought to explore how youth with purpose navigated the Great Recession.

A purpose in life serves as a compass, pointing individuals in a personally meaningful direction. Accordingly, young people with purpose have a clear picture of where they are headed (Damon, 2008). They know what they hope to accomplish, and the far horizon, personally significant goals that direct their lives, clarify how they fit within the larger society. Guided by a purpose, young people move forward confident in how they will leave their mark. But what happens to youth with purpose when the society in which they live is in the throes of a protracted economic crisis? Does purpose enable youth to thrive despite global economic challenges? If so, how? Relying on a sample of Greek youth, this mixed-methods study sought to explore these issues. More precisely, it was guided by two questions: Compared to their peers, *are youth with purpose better equipped to thrive in the midst of a severe*

economic downturn? And if so, how does having a purpose in life enable youth to envision a more positive future, despite a protracted economic crisis?

Young people, especially those in the second and third decades of life, tend to be particularly negatively influenced by economic downturns (Sherrod, 2017). Ready to enter fulltime employment, they struggle to find work. All too many end up trapped in a cycle of unemployment or underemployment, and developmental scientists have a role to play in helping youth navigate these challenges (Sherrod, 2017). This study sheds light on how the presence of purpose may help young people thrive in spite of widespread economic hardship.

In addition to helping individuals flourish, this study stands to generate findings that can help communities and countries in crisis flourish, as well. The relational developmental systems theory highlights the bidirectional relationship between individual and context (Lerner, 2004). According to this theory, the basic process in development involves mutually influential relationships between individuals and their diverse, multilevel contexts. This can contribute to a positive spiral, whereby communities contribute to the healthy development of youth and youth in turn contribute to the healthy development of their communities (Peterson, Koller, Motti-Stefanidi, & Verma, 2017). Youth are national assets, and fostering purpose during an economic downturn may inspire young people to contribute to the betterment of their communities and

countries (Diers, 2013). However, before we can advocate for the cultivation of purpose as a means of alleviating economic challenges, we need to learn more about how purpose functions in the lives of young people living under difficult economic conditions.

Literature review

Definitional matters

Here we provide a definition and theoretical framework for understanding purpose. A purpose in life is a long-term, forward-looking intention to accomplish aims that are both meaningful to the self and of consequence to the broader world (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). There are three particularly important components of this definition. First, a purpose in life is an intention. It is not a short-term objective, but a far-horizon goal. From raising caring and concerned children to helping discover a cure for cancer, it represents over-arching aims toward which individuals work. Second, a purpose in life is personally meaningful. This is typically evidenced by the dedication of time, energy, and resources toward its pursuit. Finally, a purpose in life is inspired- at least in part- by a desire to make a difference in the broader world. Studies suggest youth find purpose in caring for their families, contributing to their communities, creating new forms of art, and pursuing careers that allow them to contribute in meaningful ways (Bronk, 2012; Damon, 2008).

Based on this definition, leading a life of purpose is likely to be important across much of the lifespan. From adolescence onward, individuals can search for and pursue purpose (Bronk, 2013). However, purpose, which is closely related to identity development, is particularly relevant during the adolescent and young adult years (Burrow & Hill, 2011; Damon, 2008). As young people explore who they hope to become, they are also likely to reflect on what they hope to accomplish (Bronk, 2011). Unlike children, adolescents are generally granted a relatively high degree of independence, and unlike midlife adults, they are typically free of responsibilities such as working fulltime and caring for children. Together these circumstances create a moratorium during which young people are encouraged to explore issues of identity and purpose (Erikson, 1968, 1980). Perhaps because of this, the search for purpose has been found to be a more satisfying experience during the second and third decades of life than it is later in the lifespan (Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib, & Finch, 2009). Given the centrality of purpose to the adolescent and young adult stage, this study

investigated the influence of a major economic downturn on purpose during the second and third decades of life.

Benefits of purpose

Research on purpose has increased substantially in the past fifteen years (Bronk, 2013), and one of the clearest findings to emerge is that leading a life of purpose is critical to optimal development. Studies find that individuals with purpose are physically healthier than their peers. For instance, purpose has been associated with improved cardiovascular functioning, better sleep, and even longer living (Hill & Turiano, 2014; Ryff, Singer, & Love, 2004; Turner, Smith, & Ong, 2017).

Not only do individuals with purpose live longer lives, they also live more fulfilling lives. Compared to others, individuals with purpose report being happier, more hopeful, and more satisfied with their lives (Bronk et al., 2009; French & Joseph, 1999). Although studies consistently find that purpose is associated with these positive physical and psychological experiences, most of this research has been conducted with samples of individuals living in relative peace and prosperity (Bronk, 2013; Piquart, 2002). No empirical work, to our knowledge, has intentionally investigated the experience of leading a life of purpose among a sample of individuals growing up amidst a severe economic recession, and leading developmental psychologists argue too little empirical research exists to conclude what effect an economic downturn is likely to have on positive youth development (Sherrod, 2017).

Despite this, there are good reasons to expect an economic downturn would influence youth development more generally and the pursuit of purpose more specifically. In addition to directly influencing youths' job prospects, indirect effects are likely to be felt through families. Economic shocks are commonly felt in families, where parents may suddenly find themselves out of work and under severe economic pressure, which can contribute to increases in anxiety, depression, and family conflict (Conger et al., 1992). According to the family stress model, these conditions are likely to influence young people's developmental trajectories, including their pursuit of purpose, in significant ways (Conger & Elder, 1994).

Economic situation in greece

It is generally accepted that a recession exists whenever a country's seasonally adjusted gross domestic product contracts across two consecutive quarters. The Great Recession refers to a period of global economic decline

that started in the late 2000s and lasted into the early 2010s. It began in the United States, brought on by a variety of factors including the subprime mortgage meltdown and the related financial crisis of 2007–08, but it quickly spread. According to the International Monetary Fund (2009), the Great Recession was far and away the worst global slowdown since the Great Depression.

The timing and severity of the Great Recession varied by country; Greece was particularly hard hit (World Bank, 2012). The recession began in Greece in 2008, and although most developed countries experienced a weak recovery beginning in 2010–11, Greece remained in recession at least until the time this manuscript was written. Therefore, as a means of studying purpose in the midst of economic crisis, the present study relied on a sample of Greek adolescents.

This economic crisis is on-going, and consequently, research is only beginning to emerge about its effects on young people. Although the overall picture is grim, results of the handful of studies that have been conducted suggest results of the economic downturn on positive youth development are far from clear. For instance, one study, comparing cohorts of Greek adolescents before and after the economic downturn, concluded that the crisis generally influenced young people in negative ways, but also—surprisingly—in some positive ways (Motti-Stefanidi & Asendorpf, 2017). Compared to Greek youth who grew up before the crisis, youth growing up amidst the crises experienced more economic problems and displayed worse behavior in school, higher rates of absenteeism, and lower levels of self-efficacy. At the same time, youth growing up amidst the economic crisis reported about the same levels of overall well-being and, remarkably, some reported higher levels of academic achievement than youth growing up prior to the economic crisis.

Other studies suggest the economy's influence may be more detrimental to the pursuit of positive youth development. For instance, recent studies of Greek youth during the Great Recession have highlighted a lack of personal goals, high rates of pessimism, a lack of self-confidence, and poorer academic outcomes among youth growing up amidst the economic downturn (Frangos et al., 2012). In this same study, Greek youth reported a sense of abandonment and this—coupled with a loss of confidence in state institutions—has been linked to Brain Drain, where the best and brightest in the country move away to seek employment. Youth unemployment in Greece reached an unprecedented 50% in 2016 (Papanastasiou, Ntafouli, & Kourtidou, 2016).

Still other studies suggest socioeconomic status may moderate the effects of economic crisis. A set of four

studies carried out in the first years of the Greek crisis found that youth from higher socioeconomic backgrounds reported better psychosocial outcomes, including higher levels of self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, sibling and parental support, school engagement, and resilience. These wealthier youth also reported better mental health and more positive perceptions of hypothetical and actual negative life events than their poorer peers (Leontopoulou, *in press*).

Present study

To begin to understand how youth with purpose weather a protracted and severe economic downturn, the present study featured a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. Surveys were administered to determine if youth with purpose reported a more positive view of the future, despite the economic crisis, and interviews were subsequently conducted with a subset of those youth to gain a clearer understanding of how and why youth with purpose were (or were not) better equipped to handle challenges associated with the economic crisis. Positive future expectations, which refer to the extent to which individuals anticipate achieving specific positive outcomes or skills in the future (e.g. having a happy life; Wyman, Cowen, Work, & Kerley, 1993), have been identified as a developmental asset, a contributing factor to healthy outcomes, and a key component of positive youth development (Benson, 2006; Schmidt, Phelps, & Lerner, 2011; Stoddard & Pierce, 2015). Accordingly, and fittingly given that youth in this study stand on the brink of adulthood, positive future expectations was used as an operationalization of thriving. Findings were integrated across methods to gain a more complete picture of the way purpose affected positive youth development amidst an economic downturn.

Methods

Participants

Survey participants included adolescents ($N = 192$; *Mean age* = 21.55; *SD* = 1.82) living in Greece in the fall of 2016. Nearly all participants were Greek (95.4%). The sample was 32% male and included individuals majoring in a range of academic subjects, including Primary Education, Economics, and Physics at the University of Ioannina, a top-rated higher education institution in Greece. Following the protocol deemed exempt by Claremont Graduate University's Institutional Review Board ('Purpose among Greek Youth,' IRB Application #2809), announcements about the study

were made in classes, and interested students went online to complete consent forms and surveys. Participants were asked to include their email addresses and phone numbers so we could follow up with them if they were selected to participate in the interview. No payment or other inducements for participation were offered.

Interview participants included a subset of the survey sample ($n = 26$). Interview participants were 42% male and were selected based on their purpose survey scores. Approximately half the sample had above-average purpose scores ($n = 12$; *Mean purpose score* = 5.48, and *Mean purpose score for high purpose group* = 6.09; $SD = 0.40$), and half had below-average purpose scores ($n = 14$; *Mean purpose score for low purpose group* = 5.13; $SD = 0.32$). The mean purpose score for the above-average group was significantly higher than that of the below-average group ($t = -6.72$; $p < 0.001$). This extreme groups design was used to highlight youths' different experiences based on their purpose level.

Measures

Participants completed four scales for the quantitative portion of the study. Although nearly all Greeks speak at least some English, most are more comfortable speaking and working in their native language. Accordingly, surveys were translated, (from English to Greek), back-translated, and checked by bilingual scholars.

Claremont purpose scale

To assess the presence of purpose, the 12-item Claremont Purpose Scale (CPS) was administered (Bronk, Riches, & Mangan, 2018). Consistent with the definition of purpose (Damon et al., 2003), the CPS assesses the three dimensions of this construct, including goal orientation, personal meaningfulness, and a beyond-the-self motivation. Four items assess each dimension. Items include, 'How hard are you working to make your long-term aims a reality?' (goal-directedness), 'How clear is your sense of purpose in life?' (personal meaningfulness), and 'How important is it to you to make the world a better place in some way?' (beyond-the-self orientation). High scores indicate individuals meet all or most of the criteria for purpose, midrange scores indicate they meet some of the criteria, and low scores indicate they meet few criteria. Internal consistency was high in the measure's initial validation ($\alpha = .93$; Bronk et al., 2018) and with this sample ($\alpha = .83$).

Resilience scale

The 15-item Resilience Scale (RS-15) measures resilience as a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Scores on the scale correlate positively with morale and life satisfaction and negatively with depression (Wagnild & Young, 1993). Participants respond to items such as, 'I usually manage one way or another' and 'My belief in myself gets me through hard times' using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*. Item responses are averaged, with higher scores meaning greater perceived resilience. The RS15 demonstrated strong internal consistency in its initial validation ($\alpha = .91$; Neill & Dias, 2001) and in this study ($\alpha = .89$).

Beliefs about the economy

Participants' beliefs about the economy were assessed using five independent items created for this study. The first item asked participants to report on the extent to which they felt they understood the current economic situation. The second asked about the extent to which they felt the economy was on the right track, the third, on the degree to which they felt the economy was improving, and the fourth and fifth items measured the extent to which the economy influenced participants' pursuit of purpose and their plans for the future, respectively. Participants responded to each item using a 4-point Likert-style score ranging from (1) *not at all* to (4) *completely*.

Future expectations

Participants' future expectations were assessed using a 6-item scale created for this study. Items were designed to gauge the extent to which the current economic situation influenced participants' expectations for the future. Participants answered questions, such as 'What are your expectations for the next five years regarding your family's financial situation?' using a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from (1) *very pessimistic* to (7) *very optimistic*. The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.87$).

Optimism

Optimism was measured using a 4-item scale adapted from a social research survey measuring participants' feelings about their future compared to the experiences of previous generations (Chhatralia, Pye, Stevens, Solomon, & Quarell, 2014). Participants answered

questions, such as, ‘Overall, do you think the quality of your life is likely to be better or worse than your parents’ has been?’ Participants responded using a 3-point Likert-style scale that included (1) *better*, (2) *about the same*, or (3) *worse*. Optimism items in this study were internally consistent ($\alpha = 0.74$).

Revised youth purpose interview protocol

Interviews were guided by the Revised Youth Purpose Interview tool (Andrews, Bundick, Jones, Bronk, Mariano, & Damon, 2006). This semi-structured interview protocol was designed to assess the presence and development of purpose. Questions ask participants to discuss the personally meaningful aims they most hope to accomplish, their reasons behind pursuing those aims, and the steps they have taken and plans they have in place for making progress toward those aims. An additional line of questioning was added to this interview to probe participants’ perspectives on the current economic situation. These questions asked interviewees to talk about if, how, and why the current economic situation had influenced (or not) their plans for the future and their pursuit of purpose. Interviews were conducted in school libraries, local cafes, or other mutually convenient locations by native Greek graduate students, all of whom underwent extensive training. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, translated (from Greek to English), back-translated, and checked for quality. Transcripts were similarly translated (from Greek to English), back-translated, and checked for quality. Identifying information was removed.

Data analysis

This study utilized a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach. Consistent with our design and aims, a sequential explanatory approach to mixed-methods research is appropriate when one research strand precedes another (in the case of this study, quantitative data collection preceded qualitative data collection) and when the qualitative data are used to provide greater explanation of the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Quantitative data analysis

To address the first research question, regarding *the role purpose plays in buffering against the potentially demoralizing effects of the economic crisis*, two analyses were conducted. First, correlations were run to assess the relationship among purpose, resilience, optimism, future expectations, beliefs about the economic

situation, and beliefs about the future. Second, multiple regressions tested potential mediators between purpose and expectations for the future.

Qualitative data analysis

To address the second research question, regarding *how leading a life of purpose helps (or doesn’t help) youth maintain a more positive view of the future*, a conventional content analysis was conducted (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). A conventional content analysis is an inductive approach to coding data that allows themes to emerge and be organized to begin to build a theory. Given that little is known about youth with purpose amidst economic crises, this exploratory approach to data analysis fit our needs (Glaser, 1965). To conduct this analysis, members of the research team read through transcripts noting themes and patterns that emerged first within participants and later across participants. In this way, the study utilized both idiographic and nomothetic data analytic approaches (Allport, 1962). These theme and patterns served as the basis for code generation. Emerging codes were subsequently applied to each transcript, and elaborations, refinements, and omissions were made as needed to ensure the codes accurately described the data. Finally, codes were linked to one another, and associations were tested across participants, to begin to sketch a theory of how pursuing purpose can help young people maintain a more positive view of the future and their role in it, despite economic hardship.

Results

Quantitative findings

Correlational analyses

Purpose was significantly, positively correlated with optimism, positive future expectations, and resilience. The extent to which the economy influenced participants’ plans for the future was also significantly related to purpose scores, such that compared to individuals with lower purpose scores, those with higher purpose scores were more likely to believe the economy influenced their plans for the future. Knowledge of the economic situation, beliefs about whether the economy was on the right track, pursuit of purpose and beliefs about whether the economy was improving were not significantly related to purpose scores. These results provide some evidence for the buffering effect of purpose in the face of a severe economic downturn. Descriptive statistics and correlational analyses can be found in Table 1.

Mediation model tests

Regressions were performed to assess whether optimism and/or resilience mediated the relationship between purpose and expectations for the future. Following the guidelines of Baron and Kenny (1986), this analysis requires assessment of whether the predictor variable (purpose) predicts the outcome variable (expectations for the future). Second, the predictor variable needs to predict the mediator (optimism and/or resilience). Third, the mediator must predict the outcome variable. Finally, if there is a mediation effect, the regression coefficient of the predictor on the outcome should decrease when controlling for the mediator. A full mediational effect would be indicated if the coefficient is no longer significant. If the coefficient remains significant, partial mediation can be assessed using a Sobel test (Sobel, 1982). Therefore, in all, up to five different tests may be performed for the two mediational models; all effects were tested against an alpha level of 0.01, in line with a Bonferroni correction.

Resilience mediated the relationship between purpose and future expectations. A significant positive relationship existed between purpose and future expectations ($\beta = 0.43$, $t(192) = 3.88$, $p < 0.001$). Purpose positively predicted resilience ($\beta = 0.66$, $t(194) = 8.45$, $p < 0.001$), and resilience positively predicted future expectations ($\beta = 0.51$, $t(192) = 6.22$, $p < 0.001$). When controlling for resilience, the regression coefficient for purpose on future expectations became insignificant ($\beta = 0.12$, $t(192) = 1.00$, $p = 0.32$). This suggests most of the variance in the relationship between purpose and future expectations was accounted for by resilience, indicating that those with a stronger purpose maintained positive future expectations by way of their resilience in the face of adversity.

Optimism also mediated the relationship between purpose and future expectations. Purpose predicted optimism ($\beta = 0.16$, $t(192) = 2.26$, $p < 0.05$), and optimism predicted future expectations ($\beta = 0.80$, $t(192) = 7.64$, $p < 0.001$). However, when controlling for optimism the

regression coefficient for purpose on future expectations only dropped slightly (from $\beta = 0.43$ to $\beta = 0.31$, $t(192) = 3.14$, $p < 0.005$). A Sobel test of partial mediation was significant ($z = 2.14$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that optimism partially mediated the relationship between purpose and future expectations, such that a sense of optimism helped those with higher rates of purpose maintain positive future expectations.

Qualitative findings

Quantitative findings suggested purpose was associated with higher rates of optimism, resilience, and positive future expectations, and the relationship between purpose and a positive view of the future was mediated by resilience and partially mediated by optimism. The interviews helped illustrate these relationships and explain why and how they held.

Emergent themes suggested youth with above-average purpose scores felt efficacious about their ability to navigate a successful future, despite the economic downturn. Consequently, they focused on finding jobs that enabled growth and served as a source of joy and meaning. Youth with below-average purpose scores, on the other hand, felt the future was futile, and consequently, they discussed jobs primarily as tools for survival. Related to these different professional-orientations, high-purpose youth were reluctant to leave Greece to find work, whereas low-purpose youth seemed almost eager to do so. High-purpose youth managed to remain hopeful by focusing on how they could help, support, and contribute to their friends, family, communities, and country, and at times, by tuning out the negative economic news. Each of these related themes is spelled out in greater detail below.

Efficacy versus futility

All the youth interviewed acknowledged the challenges resulting from the economic crisis. On the brink of graduating from college, youth in this sample were particularly concerned about the diminished job

Table 1. Correlations and descriptive statistics (N = 198).

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Purpose	–								
2. Optimism	.16*	–							
3. Expectations	.27**	.48**	–						
4. Resilience	.52**	.16*	.41**	–					
5. Economy -> Future	.15*	-.25**	-.20**	.00	–				
6. Economy -> Purpose	.13	-.23**	-.27**	.01	.71**	–			
7. Economy -> Right Track	-.05	.10	.24**	.01	-.09	-.14	–		
8. Economy -> Improving	.08	.17*	.35**	.21**	-.09	-.04	.56**	–	
9. Economy -> Understand	.01	.08	.01	.08	.11	.09	-.01	.03	–
Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.									
Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
M	5.49	1.20	3.45	5.23	10.70	9.44	1.75	1.71	5.97
SD	.65	.63	1.03	.82	3.95	4.20	1.50	1.23	3.60

prospects associated with the recession. However, efficacy emerged as a consistent theme among the youth with above-average purpose scores and not among the youth with below-average purpose scores. High-purpose youth were more likely to say they felt confident they could help their country improve its economic situation: 'I believe the younger generation has the knowledge and the will to change things, to fix the mistakes of the previous generations, and I think we'll manage it.' Despite the Great Recession, high-purpose youth reported feeling efficacious about their own futures. For example, when asked if the economic and political realities were likely to hold up her professional goals, a young woman noted, 'They affect it because, since we're in this mess, I have to try even harder. All this makes me even *more* obstinate and even *more* driven to try. I mean, let them do what they like, I'll do more.' Other participants with above-average purpose scores espoused a more general sense of efficacy. Rather than feeling helpless in the face of the crisis, they said things like this young man, 'If someone won't fight, why should they gain anything? We have to fight for what we want; that applies to everything.'

Rather than discussing an efficacious orientation to the future, participants with below-average purpose scores tended to report that the future was futile. When asked if there was anything she could do to help address the crisis, an exasperated young woman with a below-average purpose score said,

If we look at it globally, all these wars and so on are very bad. Capitalist politics and imperialist politics in general. In Greece, too, everything's terrible with the economic crisis and now with Golden Dawn and so on, and what happened in America with Trump generally. The more you get into this stuff, the more you realize that things are bad. I don't know what I could do to change all that!

When asked what she could do to help address the economic situation, another individual with a below-average purpose score said, 'I don't know. I won't say I could vote differently because I don't really believe that would change anything.' In addition to feeling the country was beyond repair, these young people also reported feeling their futures were blocked. An aspiring educator said, 'I'd like not just for me, but for all teachers to play a bigger part in the education system... The Ministry of Education keeps changing things. They don't even ask teachers, who play a direct role in schools.' In sum, in light of the economic challenges, whereas efficacy emerged as a theme among youth with above-average purpose scores, futility emerged as a more common theme among youth with below-average purpose scores.

Thriving rather than merely surviving

Just as the two groups discussed the future in different terms, individuals scoring above- and below-average on purpose also discussed their professional aims in varied ways. Presumably as a result of feeling they could effect a positive future, high-purpose individuals were more likely to focus on professional growth and fulfillment. For instance, when asked what it means to live a good life, one young man with an above-average purpose score referenced his career plans: 'To have a good life? In the sense of succeeding in the field I've chosen to study, to climb the ladder. I mean to acquire skills that will be useful for me to be productive.' Another manifestation of professional growth and thriving was evident in the high-purpose youths' focus on obtaining meaningful, enjoyable jobs: 'Whatever we do, it should be something we enjoy. Really love it, I mean. The problem is that most people just do what they must because they need the money.' In response to what success looked like to her, another high-purpose individual said, 'If I had a job that not only provided me with some income, which is obviously important, but which I also enjoyed, I mean so I'd want to go into work every day.' In short, high-purpose individuals viewed jobs as potential sources of growth, enjoyment, and meaning.

In contrast, youth with below-average purpose scores tended to view jobs as tools for survival: 'I'd like to find a way to get a job, to be self-sufficient. Of course, that's very difficult these days.' Another low-purpose individual noted, 'I mainly want to have a job and be able to get by.' The focus on 'getting by' was prevalent among the below-average purpose group.

Staying versus leaving

Related to their different career prospects, high- and low-purpose youth also devised different plans. Both groups acknowledged that they may *have* to leave the country to find employment, but the high-purpose youth were reluctant to do so. They said things such as this: 'My basic aim is to stay in Greece. To give it a go here. But if things get very bad, I don't rule out leaving. But I'd like to give it a go here, in my country.' Similarly, another said, 'Generally I hear lot of people saying they want to leave the country, and I don't like that at all. I wouldn't want to leave.' Still another high-purpose youth's reluctance to leave was evident in her desire to return and help other Greeks. 'I see going abroad as a skill, [so] I must definitely come back and help others with what I've learned and done abroad.'

In contrast to the reluctance of the youth with above-average purpose scores, those with below-average purpose scores were eager to leave the country.

When asked how her plans for the future had been influenced by the economic crisis, a low-purpose student replied, '[My plans have changed because now I'm thinking about] going abroad. I've been thinking about it very seriously recently.' Another low-purpose student said, 'I believe that if I go abroad, I'll make my life there. I don't see myself coming back. And if I do, it will only be after many years. Because the people who have returned, regret it.' Only one individual with a below-average purpose score said he would never leave Greece, but he vowed to remain not because he believed things might get better or because he could navigate a successful future despite the challenging circumstances. He declined to leave because he was afraid. 'The option of going abroad terrifies me, personally, I can't imagine it. I don't think I could do it.'

Hopeful versus hopeless

Although all youth expressed concerns about the future, youth with above-average purpose scores saw some signs of hope. For instance, when asked what her aspirations were for the future, one young woman with a particularly high-purpose score noted, 'No matter how difficult the situation is, either financially or otherwise, when you really look for something and go for it you'll always get it. I don't think there's any chance you won't.' When asked about the likelihood of achieving his goals, another high-purpose individual told us, 'If you think you can achieve better things, then you will.' Echoing these sentiments, another high-purpose individual focused on the importance of hopes and dreams. An aspiring teacher said she wanted her future students 'to have plans, goals and dreams for themselves. Many children might not because they hear about the situation. And that's very bad... [But] what's the point in living if you have nothing to hope for?'

Although a few of the low-purpose youth expressed hope in the future, more expressed a sense of hopelessness. For instance, one individual noted, 'I don't see any light at the end of the tunnel.' Another, who was planning to leave the country said, 'if I stayed in Greece, my outlook would be very poor, I mean I wouldn't have any hopes for the next 20 years.' Still another described the situation in the country as utterly hopeless: 'We're worse off than we've ever been. There have been difficult situations in the past [but] ... I believe that in the past two years we've been on the point of total destruction. We'll be destroyed.'

Outward versus inward focus

One way high-purpose individuals managed to remain hopeful was to focus on how they could address the

needs of others, including their families, friends, and communities. Typical of the high purpose sample, one young woman noted, 'My hopes for the future are to help people so we all have a better future.' In acknowledging the challenging economic situation, another high-purpose individual expressed a desire to 'try to help someone through that, too, whether it's poetry or music. If I can, why not do it?' Still another student with an above-average purpose score reported, 'It's the only way we can move forward, by looking out for all of us, not just ourselves.' What is noteworthy in these quotations – and in others from the high-purpose youth – is the consistent focus on helping others as a means of helping themselves. Progress could only be achieved, the high-purpose youth reported, when everyone moves forward. This sentiment was not common among the low-purpose individuals.

Instead, low-purpose individuals focused on taking care of themselves. As if in survival-mode, they said things such as,

Why should I waste my time helping other people, when I could use these ideas to help myself first? ... I do want to help society, because as I said before, young people are the future of the whole planet, but I might look to my personal well-being first.

Other low-purpose individuals were similarly concerned with meeting their own needs, particularly with ensuring their health and happiness. When asked what was most important to him, a young man with a below-average purpose score said, 'to have your health and so on, and to have the essentials for a decent life.' Another said, 'I think the most important thing is to feel good about yourself,' and still another said, 'I don't want to have an impact, I don't care about that... That's the most important thing for me- just doing things that I enjoy.' As these comments- and others- reveal, individuals with below-average purpose scores tended to focus on their own advancement, whereas individuals with above-average purpose scores managed to remain hopeful and motivated at least in part by focusing on helping others.

Ignoring bad news

Finally, in addition to focusing on helping others as a means of remaining hopeful about the future, another strategy individuals with above-average purpose scores used was, at times, tuning out troubling economic news. For instance, one young woman with an above-average purpose score noted, 'I keep hearing about [the Memorandum]. Now, as to exactly what the Memorandum is, I'm not very well informed.' And

another said, 'Obviously the economic crisis we're all going through, the political instability, the insecurity about what might happen tomorrow. Those are the most important things in our country at the moment, although I'm not very politicized,' and still another said, 'let me say right away that I used to ... read stuff every day, but now I've stopped.' These individuals were not ignorant of the economic realities, however, neither were they obsessed by them. By not ruminating on the bad news, they were likely able to regulate their emotions and remain more hopeful about the future. In contrast, none of the low-purpose individuals admitted to occasionally tuning out bad news.

Discussion

Given that globalization is a reality now and in the foreseeable future, and that it significantly influences the contexts- both directly and indirectly- in which youth grow up, understanding its role in positive youth development is critical (Sherrod, 2017). This study sought to determine if the presence of purpose might help youth growing up amidst a global economic crisis thrive, and if so, how.

Survey results shed light on the first part of this question- *does leading a life of purpose help buffer youth from the otherwise potentially demoralizing effects of a severe economic recession?* The short answer appears to be yes. Survey results suggest purpose scores were positively associated with optimism, resilience, and positive future expectations. More specifically, high-purpose youth reported significantly more positive future expectations than low-purpose youth. Survey results also concluded that purpose was not related to youths' knowledge of the economic conditions or their belief that conditions were heading in the right direction. In other words, young people- regardless of their purpose score- were equally likely to say they were well-informed about the economic situation and to believe it was not improving. In fact, youth with high purpose scores were more likely than youth with low purpose scores to report that the economy influenced their plans for the future. These conclusions suggest it was *not* the case that youth with purpose envisioned a more hopeful future by simply ignoring the economic issues or by believing the economic problems would quickly and easily be resolved or by believing their plans were unlikely to be unaffected by the challenging economic conditions. Something else was responsible for their positive future expectations, and interviews help illuminate what that might be.

First, though, mediation analysis of the survey results suggest optimism partially mediated the relationship

between purpose and positive future expectations. This means youth with purpose were more likely to view the future positively in small part because they were optimistic, and prior research has found that purpose and optimism are related (Ho, Cheung, & Cheung, 2010). In light of the finding that all youth regardless of their purpose level reportedly felt the economy was neither improving nor moving in the right direction, we can conclude their optimism did not stem from a belief that economic conditions were likely to improve in the near future.

A second mediation analysis concluded that resilience fully mediated the relationship between purpose and young people's positive future expectations. In other words, the resilience that stemmed from leading a life of purpose enabled young people to envision a positive future. Studies have consistently concluded that purpose is related to resilience (Benard, 1991; Nygren et al., 2005), and more recent research suggests purpose may contribute to the development of resilience, rather than the other way around (Isaacs et al., 2016). By dint of having a clear picture of where they were heading, youth with purpose became better equipped to weather inevitable obstacles and setbacks. Accordingly, it seems resilience may be one way purpose enabled individuals to look past the current challenges and toward a brighter future.

Whereas survey results established that youth with purpose were more likely to hold positive future expectations, the interview results begin to specify *how* youth with purpose managed to envision a more positive future despite challenging economic conditions. Emergent themes sketch the contours of a model of purpose amidst economic hardship. This model suggests youth with above-average purpose scores felt efficacious about their ability to navigate a successful future, despite the enduring economic challenges. Consequently, they focused on finding jobs- preferably in Greece- that would enable growth and serve as a source of joy and meaning. They focused on helping their friends, families, communities, and country succeed along with them. By working to support the people and communities around them they simultaneously made it more likely that they would succeed. Evident among youth with above-average purpose scores was a belief that their success was tied to the success of the people around them. In other words, for youth with above-average purpose scores, helping others succeed was a critical component of their own success. Finally, as a means of not being bogged down by the bad news, at times youth with purpose tuned out negative economic news. This strategy likely further enabled them to maintain a positive view of the future.

In addition to looking at results from qualitative and quantitative methods separately, it can be useful to consider them together. A strength of mixed methods research is the ability it provides researchers to integrate conclusions across methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Doing so allows for illustration and expansion of findings while at the same time minimizing weaknesses inherent in using either method alone. Following is a brief discussion of the findings integrated across methods.

Survey results suggested that leading a life of purpose enabled young people to envision a positive future, despite the economic conditions, and interview results, where hope emerged as a common theme among youth with above-average purpose scores, illustrated this finding. Integrating findings across surveys and interviews also helps clarify how leading a life of purpose helped the Greek youth envision a positive future. Survey results suggest it was *not* the case that youth were less well-informed about the economic problems. Nor were they more likely than their non-purposeful peers to believe conditions were improving or likely to improve in the future. Nor were they likely to believe their future plans would be unaffected by the economic challenges. In fact, youth with above-average purpose scores were significantly more likely than youth with below-average purpose scores to believe their future plans would be influenced by the economic crisis. Interview results suggest youth with purpose managed to maintain positive future expectations because they believed they *could* succeed, despite the challenging economic conditions. In other words, against the backdrop of challenging economic conditions, youth with above-average purpose scores believed their personal futures could be positive. Consistent with the definition of positive future expectations, this construct refers to positive feelings about an individual's personal future, not necessarily to positive feelings about future environmental or contextual factors (Benson, 2006). Youths' sense of efficacy was evident in their pursuit of jobs that would enable them to 'be productive' and do what they 'really loved.' It was also evident in their desire to remain in Greece. This emerging picture of efficacious young people is further under-scored by quantitative results, which concluded that the resilience that stemmed from having a clear sense of direction enabled young people to envision a more positive future. Finally, youth with above-average purpose scores at times tuned out negative economic news as a means of staying positive. This finding is interesting to consider in light of the survey finding that all youth- regardless of their purpose score- were equally well-informed about the

economic news of the day. Taking these two findings together, it seems likely youth with purpose tuned out the bad news, at least at times, as a self-regulation strategy. Doing so likely helped them avoid ruminating about things beyond their control. Self-focused rumination has consistently been linked to depressed mood (Carver & Scheier, 1990); tuning out the bad news some of the time, may have offered youth with purpose a means of maintaining a more positive view of the future.

These findings have important theoretical as well as practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, they offer insight into the way leading a life of purpose enables youth to thrive in spite of troubling economic conditions. In addition to finding that purpose helped some youth thrive, findings also highlight how this worked. In short, purposeful youth benefited from the resilience inherent in pursuing purpose, from helping their family, friends, and communities succeed, and by occasionally tuning out bad news. These insights are novel, and given today's economic realities, they are critical. From a practical perspective, findings suggest one way of helping youth weather economic downturns may be to cultivate purpose. Doing so is likely to benefit not only the young people, but also the families, communities, and even countries to which these young people may choose to contribute. By investing in youth, countries may begin to turn the tide on severe economic downturns.

Although this study makes an important contribution to the small but growing body of research designed to understand the effects of globalization on youth development, like all studies, it is not without its limitations. For instance, this study was conducted with a sample of Greek youth. Accordingly, results should only be generalized to youth from other countries and backgrounds with caution. However, these results offer a useful starting point for testing a model of purpose in the midst of an economic downturn with larger and more diverse groups of young people enduring severe economic downturns in other parts of the world. Second, the interview sample was comprised of a non-representative group of survey respondents, and interview results should be interpreted in light of this limitation. More specifically, as is the case with all qualitative work, claims cannot be made regarding the prevalence of these emergent trends. This study identified strategies youth employed to remain hopeful about the future, but it is unclear how common or how prevalent these themes are. Additional research is required to address these issues.

These relatively minor limitations notwithstanding, we believe these findings offer important and novel

insights into the way youth with purpose manage to maintain positive future expectations and thrive, despite a protracted economic crisis.

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