



THIS IS THE TIME OF TENSION* : COLLECTIVE ACTION AND SUBJECTIVE POWER IN THE GREEK ANTI-AUSTERITY MOVEMENT

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Abstract

Greece has been one of the countries which most severely suffered the consequences of the global economic crisis during the past two years. It has also been a country with a long tradition of protest. The present paper reports a study in which we examined the ways in which people talk about subjective power and deal with the outcome of collective action in the context of defeat. Subjective power has recently become a prominent field of research and its link to collective action has been studied mainly through the concept of collective efficacy. The current study explored questions based on recent social identity accounts of subjective power in collective action. We examined participants' experiences of subjective power before and after Mayday 2012, in Greece. Two different collective action events took place: a demonstration against austerity and a demonstration to support steel workers who were on strike. In total, 19 people were interviewed, 9 before the demonstrations and 10 after. Thematic analysis was carried out. Protest participants talked about power in terms of five first-order themes: the necessity of building power, unity, emotional effects, effects of (dis)organization, and support as success. The steel workers we spoke to experienced the events more positively than the other interviewees and had different criteria for success. Theories of collective action need to take account of the fact that subjective power has important emotional as well as cognitive dimensions, and that definitions of success depend on definitions of identity.

Keywords

empowerment, collective action, Greece, efficacy, social identity.

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*The title is a reference to the song "Heat" by the German gothic band "The Merry Thoughts".

Collective action is sometimes associated with feelings of subjective power: feelings of exhilaration, joy and ability impact upon or even change the world - as described, for example, by participants in the events of France 1968 or the US urban riots of the 1960s (e.g. Boesel, Goldberg, & Marx, 1971; Fraser, 1988). Theoretically, subjective power in collective action is important, as it represents the link between psychological and social change, and its study can show us how the forces for change might succeed or fail (Drury & Reicher, 2009). In order for collective action to be effective, participants must perceive it as such; and participants' feelings of subjective power can also be affected by collective action itself (Drury & Reicher, 1999).

The study of collective action has become more prominent during the past few years; a fact that is, perhaps, not unrelated to the increase of collective action events around the world in opposition to the global economic crisis (Marshall, 2010). In this context, the study of subjective power seems important since it could offer explanation for people's participation in widespread collective movements such as the Indignant Citizens or the Occupy movement. For these reasons, studying collective action in the context of the global economic crisis appears necessary.

The Global Economic Crisis

Between late 2007 and early 2008, the signs of a crisis in the global economy became apparent (Shah, 2010). The main cause of the crisis is thought to have been the US mortgage market which sold sub-prime mortgages to numerous people who could not pay the money back (Anonymous, 2008; Aufheben, 2010). Afterward, these mortgages were sold by Wall Street to financial institutions worldwide. What started as a banking crisis ended up affecting the real economy. Although the US as well as European countries such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom spent large amounts of money trying to salvage what they could of the world economy, the crisis had gotten out of control by then (Anonymous, 2008). The significant drop of the Dow Jones in 2009 and the collapse of the banking system led the capitalist system to the worst economic recession since the Great Depression in 1929 (Berberoglu, 2011). Unemployment, underconsumption, mortgages and debts, polarization of wealth and decline in wages are some of the characteristics of the crisis. The recession had a deep impact globally, as the case of the sovereign debt crisis in Greece, Portugal, Italy, Spain and Ireland shows.

The Greek Government-Debt Crisis

The Greek economy has faced a series of problems for more than a decade; however, these problems escalated in 2009, when the then newly elected government of Georgios Papandreou announced that their predecessors had faked the country's finances, thus building an immense debt that the country could not pay (The New York Times, 2012). After this revelation, Greece was frozen out of the bond markets and, in 2010, received an aid package from the European Union. Although this was followed by harsh austerity measures, the Greek economy continued to sink. During 2011, investors kept asking for higher and higher interest rates from Greece and, after the reduction of some of the country's debt and the introduction of even harsher austerity measures, the Prime Minister resigned. A new Prime Minister was appointed by the Troika (the tripartite committee led by the European Commission with the European Central Bank and the

International Monetary Fund, that organised loans to the governments of Greece, Ireland and Portugal and Cyprus). Up until the spring of 2012, the conditions of the bailout had brought a sense of hopelessness and depression in Greek citizens. In the elections of May 2012, the Greek people punished the main political parties which had dominated the Greek political scene for decades (PASOK and Nea Dimocratia; a center-left and right-wing party respectively) and favoured leftist parties and right-wing extremists instead. After a second round of elections, a new government was finally elected. Since the summer of 2011, the civil and economic turmoil has become the reason for many protests – some of which ended up in bloody riots, as well as occupation camps, strikes and political suicides. All this has left Greek citizens feeling numb and desperate; nevertheless, in the midst of this collective despair, some reports suggest that a newfound solidarity has arisen (Kouki & Vradis, 2011).

Studying Subjective Power In Collective Action

Though Greece's future appears bleak, or perhaps because of it, Greek citizens do not always seem disempowered; on the contrary, there is much mobilization in the form of public protest, attacking politicians and mocking national parades (Kouki & Vradis, 2011). In a context of defeat, Greek citizens do not seem to feel defeated and appear to be motivated to continue participating in collective action. The unusual situation in Greece suggests that subjective power is a complex issue, and points to the need to explain such phenomena. Greece, in its current predicament, provides ample opportunity for research into the causes, effects and experience of subjective power in collective action. The study described here is part of a bigger project which will examine these causes and effects. In the present paper, we look at the experience of subjective power in collective action in this context of defeat, and examine how far existing social psychological accounts of subjective power in collective action are inadequate to the evidence. We will suggest that the dominant approaches, for all their usefulness, also have some limitations.

Subjective Power In Collective Action: Social Psychological Approaches

In social psychology, psychological power in collective action has been studied primarily through the concept of *collective efficacy* (e.g., Tausch et al., 2011; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Collective efficacy refers to people's shared belief that they can improve their group's social position through collective effort (Bandura, 1995; Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999). Although related concepts have been used, such as agency (Simon & Klandermans, 2001) or calculation path (Sturmer & Simon, 2004), "efficacy" is the term most commonly used by researchers looking at subjective power as a predictor of participation in collective action. Thus, Sturmer and Simon's (2004) dual-pathway model, as well as van Zomeren et al.'s (2008) influential Social Identity Model of Collective Action have claimed that efficacy is one of the pathways leading to collective action (the other ones being social identity and anger/injustice). According to Hornsey et al. (2006), there are four types of efficacy in collective action, reflecting the different reasons people engage in protest to begin with: i) to convince third parties, such as the general public, ii) to influence the protesters themselves, iii) to build an oppositional movement, and iv) to express one's values.

While the concept of efficacy has been shown to have considerable predictive power

in explaining collective action participation, there are two possible limitations of efficacy as a concept for understanding subjective power in collective action. First, compared to the activist category of 'empowerment', efficacy does not capture some of the positive emotional features of feeling collectively able to have an effect in the world. During the 1960s the concept of empowerment became linked to the feelings of joy and exhilarating power that are apparent in testimonies of participants who felt that they were involved in social change (e.g. Fraser, 1988). Though the concepts of empowerment and efficacy may indeed be close, efficacy refers to the belief that an action is possible, whereas empowerment is therefore much more and has been defined as "a social and psychological state of confidence in one's ability to challenge existing relations of domination" (Drury & Reicher, 2005, p. 35). Hence, it can be defined more in terms of an emotional experience situated in a context of changing social relations rather than simply a belief.

The second limitation is that studies of efficacy in collective action have focused on studying the former as a precondition of the latter (e.g. Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999). However, there is evidence suggesting that subjective power can also be the *result* of collective action (Drury & Reicher, 1999). For example, members of the crowd participating in an anti-roads campaign reported the experience of reclaiming common land as one of increased ability to have an effect - empowerment (Drury & Reicher, 2005).

Feelings of empowerment within collective action are an important if relatively underexplored topic of research. Based on these two critical points above, we argue that exploring them is important for four reasons: theoretical, consequential, practical and phenomenological.

Theoretically, Becker (2012) suggested that there is a need for dynamic social psychological models of collective action. A phenomenon as potentially dynamic as collective action could only be adequately represented by a dynamic model. Research on the relation between psychological inputs and outputs of collective action can contribute to the development of such models. The consequences of empowerment in collective action can include further participation, just as disempowerment under certain conditions can reduce participation (Barr & Drury, 2009; Becker, Tausch and Wagner; 2011; Drury, Cocking, Beale, Hanson, & Rapley, 2005); the significance of this is that the more people participate, the greater the possibility of social change. Practical reasons for exploring further the subjective aspects of power in collective action include the hypothesis that there is a link between collective action participation and well-being. For example, Klar and Kasser (2009) found that activists reported significantly higher levels of vitality than non-activists. Finally, phenomenologically, a reason for studying empowering feelings as a result of collective action is that such experiences are often extremely important to participants themselves (Drury et al., 2005) and should therefore be acknowledged.

The Present Study

The present study sought to add to the limited existing literature on subjective power in collective action. Based on the social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), Drury et al. (2005) predicted and found that action that realizes participants' social identity against the power of dominant groups (defined as collective self-objectification; CSO) was common in activists' accounts of empowerment, and that it was predictive of reports of positive emotion. However this

study involved activists speaking about different events, so they were mostly not referring to the same experience; there is therefore a question of how people talk about changing subjective power over a single event contemporaneously. Barr and Drury's (2009) study of G8 protestors found that definitions of success and failure were linked to activist cultures and identities. However, this study examined an event-specific experience, and did not set out to examine the different ways of talking about power among participants in collective action in a general context of defeat and potential disempowerment, as in the current Greek context. The present research explores the different ways in which people talk about subjective power before and after a collective action event in the context of fighting against austerity that has already been imposed. Before describing the methods and analysis, we briefly outline the events of Mayday 2012 in Greece, which was the focus of data collection.

The Events Of Mayday 2012

A week before the 2012 elections, the annual Mayday event was organized in an anti-austerity spirit. According to Greek legislation, Mayday is considered a public holiday. Workers' unions and leftist parties normally organize marches and rallies on that day (e.g. Kopsini, 2011; Souliotis & Tsiganas, 2012). During the past couple of years, participation at the Mayday events dropped (Kopsini, 2011). In Mayday 2012, it was recorded as 13,000 people –which was considered low (Souliotis & Tsiganas, 2012). The slogan was “None by himself, together we can make it”. In reality, two different events were organized in two different locations, by two different unions. The first event's main goal was to support the workers of the Steel Company of Greece who, at that point, had been on strike for more than six months. The ownership of the Steel Company of Greece, which was 50 million euros in debt, asked the workers to sign an agreement that would reduce their working hours, resulting in subsequent cuts in salaries. The workers' total income would be reduced to 60% of what they previously earned (Anonymous, 2011; Anonymous, 2012). The workers of the factory in Aspropyrgos –an outskirt of Athens– refused to accept this and had to suffer dismissals. They went on strike on the 31st of October 2011, demanding that the salaries would not be reduced and the dismissals be revoked. About 400 steel workers occupied the factory and organized protests in Aspropyrgos, Athens and other locations¹.

The secondary goals of the event included the relaxation of austerity measures and the reinstatement of pensions and insurances. Souliotis and Tsiganas (2012) reported that this was the event which drew more people (8,000) and it was comprised of a rally at the steel factory.

The other event's goals mainly revolved around austerity, though they were less clear. The event was a march and demonstration in Kontzia square in the center of Athens. According to reports (Anonymous, 2012), 5,000 people participated. Both events were relatively peaceful, but after the march was over, a fight broke out in the centre of Athens between the police and a group of anarchists.

1 On the 5th of June 2012, the strike was declared illegal and a rally was immediately organized (Anonymous, 2012b). The strike continued until the 19th of July 2012, when the riot police intervened and evicted the workers in what ended as a violent fight between the strikers and the police. On the 28th of July 2012, the strike officially ended after a vote.

Method

Participants

Nineteen people were interviewed for this study. Fifteen of them were recruited by snowballing from the researcher's circle of friends and acquaintances for a study about collective action and the upcoming Mayday event. Four of these were previously known to the researcher, whereas the remaining eleven were contacted by those four and agreed to be interviewed for the study. The participants were of various political (e.g., leftists, not leftists) and economic backgrounds (e.g., students, unemployed, employed, self-employed). Of these, ten were men and five were women, and they were aged between 18 and 53. Four steel workers were also interviewed after being approached by one of the researcher's acquaintances. Although these interviews were not initially part of our research plan, we decided that the fact that the steel workers' strike had continued for some months after Mayday presented us with the opportunity to examine whether the experience of the Mayday event had empowered the strikers to continue their struggle. All of them were male, aged between 47 and 55. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted up to one week before the event and six up to two weeks after. Because the strike and occupation of the factory were ongoing and arranging a meeting with them was difficult, the steel workers were interviewed at a later time than our other participants – in August 2012.

Of the nine interviews carried out before Mayday, the two first were shorter than the rest (about 10 minutes long). The average length of the remaining interviews was 20-30 minutes.

Interview Schedule

The interview schedule consisted of several themes. Initial questions focused on gathering background information on the participants' views of themselves and whether they regularly participated in collective action. We wished to know how they defined themselves to gain insight to their social identities. For the interviews conducted before the Mayday event, the second theme was about expectations and hopes (e.g. "What are your hopes for this event?"; "What do you expect will happen?"). Hornsey et al. (2006) argue that what counts as "efficacious" differs for different groups. Understanding of the participants' expectations of the event would help us test this argument. Some of the items focused on emotions concerning the event, both individual and shared (e.g. "How does that make you feel?" "Do you think other people share your beliefs?"). We wished to explore the extent to which people would feel different before the event and after it. Furthermore, we asked the participants about their belief in people's power to change the world in order to find out whether efficacy was linked to emotions (e.g. "Do you think people can make a difference?"). Finally, the schedule included an open question about well-being ("Does participation in collective action affect your general quality of life?"), which was followed by three questions about happiness (e.g. "How happy do you feel?") that the participants answered by giving an estimation of their feelings in a scale of 1 to 10.

The interviews conducted after the event included all the aforementioned items, as well as some additional items on unity (e.g. "Were the people in the protest united?"), success (e.g. "Did the action change anything in line with your collective aims?"), outsiders' perceptions (e.g. "What about others outside the protest? Do you think they

saw it as having an impact?") and the elections (e.g. "Do you think the Mayday event could have awakened peoples' consciousness to the elections?").

The steel workers interviews were shorter and comprised of questions concerning the background of the strike (e.g. "Can you tell me a bit about your struggle?"), the support they received from outsiders (e.g. "Did people support you?"), emotions (e.g. "How did that make you feel?"), and their experience of Mayday (e.g. "How did you feel after Mayday, seeing that people still supported your cause?").

Thematic Analysis

Our main goal was to investigate all the different ways in which our participants expressed themselves on the issue of power. We conducted a thematic analysis of our data, using the guidelines by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a qualitative method based on identifying themes within a specific set of data that are relevant to the research questions. This particular analytic method was chosen for two reasons. First, themes in thematic analysis do not express the dominant patterns present in the data, but rather the patterns that are of relevance or significance to the researcher's interests. In order to answer the research questions set out above, the coding focused on issues related to efficacy and emotion. Furthermore, we looked for expressions of identity and unity as they have both been identified as important predictors of empowerment (e.g. Drury et al., 2005; Drury & Reicher, 1999). In terms of specific patterns, we also searched for differences between T1 (before the event) and T2 (after the event) in participants' feelings and/or beliefs. We identified extracts where the participants expressed themselves on these matters and isolated them. Then, we organized the extracts according to specific ideas talked about by the participants and we colour-coded the phrases they used in order to express said ideas. These were our first-order themes. Afterward, we examined the different issues talked about *within* each first-order theme and colour-coded them in clustered themes.

The second reason why this method was chosen was the flexibility it offers. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify patterns that, though not looked for, might be important and enriching to the theory.

Analysis

The analysis is organized into two parts, based on the two stages of data collection. We believe that, by organizing the analysis in this way, the emergent story is more clear and coherent. We identified five first-order themes in our data set for talking about subjective power in collective action. Three of these ("Building power", "Unity" and "Emotion") were present both before Mayday and after the event, as here participants were mostly referring to their hopes and expectations and general understandings of subjective power in collective action. Two other themes ("(Dis)organization", "Support") were only present in the interviews carried out afterwards, as here people were mostly talking about what had actually happened and how they felt about it. Extracts coded under *Building power* referred to the importance of building a sense of collective efficacy or agency. These particular extracts mostly concern aims and hopes and are, therefore, abstract; they do not refer directly to what actually happened on the day of the event. Extracts coded under *Emotion* referred to the way people felt about subjective power generally and during the event. Extracts coded under *Unity* referred to whether people in the crowd shared the same beliefs and were supportive of one another, and the relation

of this to empowerment. Extracts coded under *(Dis)organization* expressed participants' opinions on the lack of organization in the event as a reason for its perceived failure and their own disempowerment. Finally, the extracts coded under *Support* referred to the positive emotional effects of being supported by others in their struggle. For each of these first-order themes, we identified one or more clustered or sub-themes (cf. Table 1).

Subjective Power In The Days Before Mayday

Building power

The Mayday 2012 marches and rallies demanded relief from the harsh austerity measures imposed by the government. Our participants said that, if they were to force the government to submit to their demands, they would have to be powerful. Yet, persistent pressure by the government, the economic crisis and the Memorandum (as the economic adjustment programme is called in Greece) during previous months had diminished their feelings of power. Therefore, in order to be able to make a difference and make the politicians listen to them, they would first need to build this power again. Hence, to our participants, collective action was not simply a reflection of subjective power (as in most accounts of efficacy) but in itself could be empowering. These references to building of power appeared to be comprised of two different factors in the participants' accounts which they considered equally important: a) motivating people and b) motivating *enough* people to make a difference. We organized our analysis of *Building power* accordingly, separating it into two clustered themes: 'awakening of consciousness' and 'increase of numbers'.

Awakening of consciousness. One of the most prominent aspects of talking about power was in interviewees' ideas about the aims of the event. Participants talked about building power as an awakening of consciousness. While there were specific goals of the event (i.e. supporting the steel workers and/or fighting austerity), this awakening of consciousness was regarded as a long-term, ever-present goal for the anti-austerity protesters. In the accounts, one pathway to achieve this awakened consciousness could be through the realization of the illegitimacy of the opposite party's actions. In this case, the opposite party was the government and the Troika and, therefore, the key to building collective agency was believed by some participants to lie with the understanding that the Greek people were treated unfairly by them. This was linked with the idea that by participating in Mayday one had an opportunity of voicing feeling about this unfairness without retribution:

I wish that we'll be able to help people understand that they are being used by their employers and by the government and that they have rights worth fighting for. I realize that for many people much is at stake, but I believe May Day is a good opportunity to protest without having to fear the consequences, like, if you go on a strike for example. We are being treated unfairly and I think the more people realize that, the higher our chances of changing things will be.

(Anna)

Another pathway towards the building of power was therefore said to be collective action itself. By showing others that there are people resisting the austerity measures

Table 1 . Summary of the Analysis.

Time	First-Order Theme	Clustered Themes
Before	Building Power	Awaking of consciousness Increase numbers
	Unity	Conditional, not descriptive Strenght in numbers
	Emotion	Power leading to hope Powelessness leading to despair
	(Dis)organization	Feelings about disorganization
After	Support	Support as emotional Support as inspirational Support as victory

and that fighting is possible, some of the participants expressed their hopes of motivating others into future collective action:

We just want to make the world better and fairer, we don't want to break stuff or vandalize or get beaten up by the police. I doubt that any of the protesters wants to destroy other people's properties or businesses. I mean, especially now, when things are so tough. So we don't need the bad publicity, we only need to show to the people that we are present and active and that they can be active as well.

(Anna)

A sense of comradeship and closeness was said by some interviewees to be crucial in this collective agency building. In the following, this appeared to be linked with a sort of patriotism expressed in the urgency of 'everyone' to do something in order to help the country:

We're all in the same boat and it's sinking, so we have to help one another and act together to help our country. We have power, we just don't realize it because the media brainwash us that protest is bad.

(Anna)

Three of our participants said that the awakening of consciousness was a step towards a deeper psychological change that needed to occur. They stressed the importance of people becoming more active and more politically involved, as in this extract where speaker personalizes the change, to suggest that therefore it is possible for others too:

I wish to see people awaken, become more involved and less fatalistic. I was like that but I'm trying to change this now, so I hope that for me, personally, it will be a step towards that change. I think the people of this country have been passive long enough.

(Christophoros)

Nevertheless, the immediate goal was not neglected either. Considering the steel workers' strike as a potential source of inspiration for others, some of the participants explained the significance of making it known to more people:

I haven't really participated in previous years so, I can't really know what I think about it, though this year is different. I think it's good they're showing support to the steel factory workers and I'd like to be a part of that. I've been unemployed for almost a year now and before that I was extremely underpaid, so I think what they're doing is really courageous and it could inspire more people like myself a year ago to stand up for their rights.

(Christophoros)

Increase of Numbers. Consciousness raising alone, however, was not enough according to our interviewees. It does not only suffice for a couple of people to understand their own power; it must be massive, for the people's power lies in their numbers:

I believe most of the time it's small things as this that can bring a huge difference... maybe showing the people that not all those who protest against the government are thugs and vandals... maybe we can achieve a greater participation to the movement. I'm not saying it will happen, but I'm saying it could and we might not see it right away, but it would be huge if it did.

(Nikos)

Therefore, although the awakening of consciousness was said by participants to be a necessary condition in the building of collective agency, it was not sufficient, for it should also be awakened in enough people.

Unity

Conditional, not descriptive unity. Although unity was seen as an important factor in the success or failure of collective action in general, since the participants were interviewed before the event, their talk of unity was conditional. Thus, participants recognized the importance of a unified front and its effectiveness, but, as we shall see, when they spoke after the event they admitted that they did not feel united.

High levels of participation were considered by some to be a possible threat, as they raised the probability of the protest turning into a riot:

People are so scared and so angry. I'm not sure whether this should make me happy, like, if this means that lots of people are going to join the protest, or afraid in case it turns into a riot. People have been killing themselves in the middle of the city center, we hear about suicides like it's a casual thing, people lose their jobs and their houses, it's all so sad and frustrating, you know? But if you keep all that buried, at some point it's going to explode and this protest might be a catalyst to that. I mean, usually it's quite uneventful, but this year? Who knows?

(Anna)

A potential circular relationship with power building was identified: if enough people participate, then it can be shown that, in unity, people are stronger and can resist.

Therefore, more people's consciousness can be awakened and even greater participation in future actions can be achieved. In the following example, the role of unity and support was expressed as an axiom, rather than a report of recent experience:

You need to have hope. You need to believe. There will be elections and maybe the next government will be better... will make things better. But even if we don't achieve it right now, it matters... it's important to let people know that they can fight. Maybe then more will participate and we'll finally get somewhere.

(Vasilis)

Strength in Numbers. According to some of our participants, the government's strength lies in their ability to enforce the law and control such resources as the police, army, media and finances. However, they said that the people's strength lies in numbers, as aforementioned. Yet, they did not consider this strength to be merely physical (i.e. the more of "us", the better we can fight them off), but psychological as well, since it was seen as empowering and offering an anchor for people to feel that they are not alone in these difficult times:

Every time I participate in a protest like this and I see that other people stand by me and have similar opinions, I feel like I'm not the only sane person in a crazy world. I feel hopeful and I feel I belong.

(Nikos)

Various participants claimed that, in the context of collective action and consciousness raising, everyone counts. Yet, "everyone" would not be considered by all our interviewees to be as inclusive as the word itself might suggest. On the contrary, some of the participants said that the majority of people are content knowing that others are fighting for them, thus implying that "everyone", in reality, refers to "everyone with an awakened consciousness" or, in other words, "everyone who is like us":

If only enough people rise up and resist the austerity measures, if they...we... actually do it instead of just thinking how nice it would be if someone else could do it for us...then yes. The problem is most people want to be left alone, they like to think someone else can resist for them, fight for them. But if we could get enough people to understand that... to understand their own power... then things would change.

(Kostas).

Emotions

Empowerment is not merely a belief about own power, but also a deeply emotional experience. Thus our interviewees often talked about the issue and experience of power in emotional ways or linked it to feelings and emotions. Specifically, some interviewees linked feelings of power to hope and feelings of powerlessness to despair. Moreover, some of them claimed that participating in collective action affected their subjective well-being. Therefore, we organized our analysis of Emotions into three clustered themes: power leading to hope and excitement; powerlessness leading to despair and depression; and good feelings and well-being.

Power leading to hope and excitement. In response to the question about quality of life, participants could have answered that going on demonstrations was demanding, tiring and exhausting. On the contrary, several interviewees said that collective action could help battling depression by helping people understand and believe that it is possible to win against oppression. A few of the participants said they participated in collective action for this reason specifically:

But then I realized that this year it would be perhaps more important than ever to remind ourselves that common people can win against the capitalists and the blood-suckers. I've been feeling more and more depressed lately, so I think it'll be good for me, to remember that stuff. So I think this year I'm going.

(Kostas)

A couple of older activists addressed the issue of how continued participation in collective action for years can cause burnout and stressed the importance of keeping up the fight. They considered that recalling that people sometimes win against the governments, and the subsequent social changes such wins can bring, as the best way to avoid these feelings of tiredness and disappointment. Participation in Mayday was part of the process of keeping these important memories alive:

When you've been in as many protest as I have, participating as an individual or along some party or union, most of the times you get the feeling that you only fight in order to show that you can, that you have the right to. It's very difficult not to get disappointed. It's like burnout, you begin to lose your appetite for the fight. So looking back at the times when protest and sacrifice brought some actual changes in the world is what keeps you going. Instead of thinking that all you do is in vain, you start thinking "if they did it, why not us"? So I always go to the events on May Day or November 17².

(Dimitris)

Yet, more important, perhaps was the link some participants made between realizing one's identity through collective action and empowerment. This link to identity – our definition of who we are – seemed to be spontaneous, as the participants were not asked specifically about that:

Everything we do define us, define who we are. I wouldn't be doing it if it didn't make me feel good on some level, right? I think mainly it makes me believe in my own power, in my own strength.

(Yannis)

Powerlessness leading to despair and depression. Just as collective action could build agency, our participants seemed to consider non-participation in collective action as linked to powerlessness and despair. In the following example, Kostas draws attention to how different his emotions had been when he was younger and participated in collective action, in comparison to those he had after he stopped doing so:

2 November 17th is a holiday in Greece for all educational establishments, in memory of the Athens Polytechnic uprising against the Greek military junta, in 1973. It is celebrated each year with marches and other events.

I think I felt better, before. Like I was just myself, fighting for my values, no matter what. I felt disappointed many times, but I never felt bitter...like a misanthrope... like I feel now. I was sure of my beliefs and I knew I was acting upon them...so...I didn't matter if our demands were met...well, it mattered but I never felt like losing focus or determination. I felt I could do important things.

(Kostas)

Some interviewees argued that their experience in collective action allowed them to have a more well-informed view of the world, something which protected them from forming unrealistic expectations and, therefore, be disappointed:

I think, if I didn't participate, I would be more prone to disappointment, I mean, I don't know if I would be unhappy or depressed, but I would lack perspective, maybe, on some things, and that would lead me to many disillusionments, I believe.

(Anna)

Good feelings and Well-being. Some of the participants linked positive feelings in collective action to a more general sense of well-being and satisfaction with life, in the sense that it gave them control over their lives:

Of course! I think these workers are making a difference and setting an example for all of us! You can't win anything if you don't risk anything, you can't show the government your resentment and anger if you just stay inside watching TV or if you are scared you'll lose your job. I mean, I understand people are afraid to protest or go on a strike because money is such a huge issue for all of us, but you don't just need money, you also need to be satisfied with your life and how can you do that when you feel that they own you?

(Aris)

Subjective Power In The Days After Mayday

(Dis)organization

It was notable that most of the references to subjective power in the interviews carried out before Mayday were to power in the abstract, referred to conditions for empowerment generally, or described experiences from the past. In the interviews carried out after the event, participants had the opportunity to reflect upon the outcomes of the event and identify the reasons for its success or failure. According to most participants we interviewed, the event was considered to be a failure and they claimed that to be the fault of the lack of organization. Participants talked about how this disorganization had prevented them from acting in an effective way collectively and affected their feelings as well as the success of the event itself.

Feelings about disorganization. Some of our participants perceived the lack of cooperation between the two parties organizing the different events as a lack of organization. Others said they were disappointed by the fact that one of the two events did not have a specific goal and considered that to be part of the poor organization as well. These experiences were emotional. A number of our participants reported feeling numb and awkward during the event:

I went to the event really hopeful, but I ended up feeling sort of, well, disillusioned, I suppose. It felt really weird that there were two different events and there was no connection between the participants.

(Pavlos)

Some of the people we interviewed expressed the opinion that the steel factory event was better because it had a clear, set goal:

The steel factory event was considered better, I think, probably because it had a tangible goal: supporting the workers and it makes you feel good to support other people, especially these days. But the other one was much less focused and it just managed to cause disappointment and confusion.

(Nathalie)

This observation seems to be supported by the fact that some of our participants who were at the steel factory event reported feeling more satisfied with it than those who were at the march downtown:

Well, if we go with chaos theory, then even the smallest things can have an impact on the world, even if they go unnoticed. I don't know about everyone, but I'm sure many people were satisfied even with the little we achieved that day.

(Markos)

This disorganization seemed to affect perceptions of success and was referred to by some of our participants as the main reason of the event's failure:

I think there was some confusion, as well as concerning the reasons why there were two different events. I think that was partly why it didn't go that well. I don't regret going, but I think it could have achieved more had it been better organized.

(Maria)

Support

Support as success. The steel workers that we interviewed repeatedly emphasized the importance of support, which for them was the reason they regarded the Mayday event as successful, a theme that was absent in the responses of the other interviewees. Rather than talking about support as an abstract condition of empowerment, as the protest participants did, the steel workers focused on it as a central part of their experience of the event. Support as success was discussed by the steel workers in three ways: support as emotional, support as inspirational and support as victory.

Support as emotional. In the case of the protest participants, the building of power was considered to be a goal in itself. The way our interviewees talked about it could be deemed theoretical, using phrases such as “awakening of consciousness”. They recognized the importance of support, but as a general and abstract condition; they did not experience as much support as they hoped for during the event itself. The steel workers, though, spoke in a manner that was experiential rather than theoretical. Answering a question concerning his feelings on the support they received, Giorgos answered:

In awe. Maybe even scared a little. But also...so full of energy, of power...I wanted to show everyone ...I wanted to show them that we were with them as well, we were fighting for them as well...not just ourselves.

(Giorgos)

The steel workers expressed their feelings concerning the moral support that they received on the demonstration using powerful words and vivid imagery. They considered solidarity to be the source of exhilarating emotions and used language accordingly to express that. To the same question as above, Stelios said:

It was beautiful. I had always thought that kindness had died in this society...you know what I mean? But I was so pleased to see that I was wrong. The moral support, the moral satisfaction we got from them, it was unbelievable, we felt like...I don't know how to put it...we felt like agents of the people, like this struggle surpassed our little cause and were fighting for them...this gave us a will to fight harder.

(Stelios)

Thus the emotions brought about by the support were positive because the support indicated to the steel workers that they were not alone and indeed, their fight was important to other people.

Support as inspirational. One of the initial goals of the strike was to achieve solidarity with the steel workers and, from the steel workers' perspective, the Mayday event satisfied that goal. This fact is essential to understand why protest participants and steel workers perceived the event in such a different manner.

The steel workers seemed to experience the Mayday event in a positive way. They outlined the importance of being supported by the people and, some among them, explained that this was particularly the case after so many months of strike, when they themselves had become weary:

After all those months, at some point you stop hoping and you just keep fighting because it's the only thing you can do, the only way you can be true to yourself and to those who supported you. And many people had forgotten all about us by then or even, in some cases, never heard of our struggle. So it was a huge deal to see that so many saw our cause as legitimate and were supportive even if it didn't mean anything personal to them...they didn't know us, they weren't our co-workers... just people who came to show us that our fight is important. It helped a lot with morale.

(Panos)

For these interviewees, support was seen as a powerful and positive result, though some scepticism did exist. One of the steel workers considered the possibility that, with Mayday being so close to the elections, maybe some political parties tried to take advantage of their struggle. However, that possibility did not diminish the gratitude towards those people whom he considered honest in their intentions:

I'm not really sure how I feel about that. I mean, I do appreciate those who came

for us, because they acted from their hearts, it was what they believed. But I think others tried to take advantage of our struggle in order to get attention themselves, people from political parties or unions...it was...suspicious that they would remember us again all of the sudden so close to the elections.

(Stelios)

Support as victory. The steel workers interviews showed that the interviewees talked about support as a success in its own right – as a victory. They identified support from others as the core of their own strength and will to keep fighting. Apart from the power and the improvement in morale, though, some of the steel workers talked about another sort of psychological change that they experienced due to this massive and unexpected support. They reported their feelings concerning the strike itself changing from rightful fury towards their employers to a duty towards those who supported them. Many steel workers talked about fighting being their “obligation” to those who had helped them or about “having a responsibility not to fail them”.

There were people there we had never seen before...you know? Of different ages and political spaces, but they all came together for our sake, to help us, support us...it made me feel very aware...of my duty...to keep going no matter what. Keep fighting. If people were on our side, we had already won. You see?

(Panos)

Panos’s last sentence in the example above expresses not only this deep psychological change but, also, the fact that achieving solidarity, which was one of the initial goals, was perceived as a win in itself, regardless of whether their demands would be heard by the ownership of the factory.

Discussion

Our interviewees who attended the Mayday events in Greece in the context of the anti-austerity movement talked about subjective power in a number of different ways. The protest participants talked about subjective power as a condition of success but, also, as a goal in itself. For some among them, merely participating in collective action could be empowering and was even something that could contribute to well-being, especially in the context of despair brought upon Greek citizens by the harsh austerity measures. Although, they did recognize the importance of unity and support, they did not experience much of these two during the event. In fact, most of their talk concerning subjective power was abstract and did not refer to their particular experiences of the event. This might be because they did not consider the Mayday event successful; they identified the lack of organization as the cause of that perceived failure.

The steelworkers we spoke to, on the other hand, perceived the event as successful in terms of achieving solidarity for their cause. Their accounts of power were experiential instead of conditional and they considered support as the pathway to empowerment and positive feelings, and as a victory in its own right. The strikers seemed to have a different experience of the event than the protest participants overall, perhaps because they felt supported by other people. Though they did not disregard the importance of subjective power, it was to them an unexpected result of their quest for support. This

power, however, seemed to rekindle their will to fight because, by then, they felt a duty towards the people who had helped them.

Our findings on empowerment do not aim to diminish the importance of previous research which has outlined the importance of the concept of efficacy as a predictor of collective action (e.g. van Zomeren et al. 2008). What we believe our findings to show is another dimension to subjective power in collective action: that subjective power can be both a means and a goal of collective action. Thus our analysis uncovered a richness and diversity of emotional experience of subjective power which seems to be in agreement with accounts of empowerment in history, such as Fraser's (1988) account of France 1968 for example. When discussing empowerment, participants would get excited and express themselves in words that conveyed passion and emotion. This particular aspect of the phenomenology of empowerment has been previously discussed by Drury et al. (2005). However, their participants were activists and their data covered a number of experiences rather than a single event. Our participants were activists as well as protest participants and they were interviewed about their experience of one specific event. Hence, the present study explored the phenomenology of changing subjective power in a particular collective action event concurrently, whereas the previous phenomenological study (Drury et al. 2005) aimed to investigate the phenomenology of empowerment in collective action in general.

The two groups of interviewees - protest participants and steel workers - did not experience subjective power in the same way. This diversity was particularly interesting because it seems to suggest that different groups may not experience the same event as empowering in the same way, and that, therefore, empowerment in collective action depends on definitions of success which in turn are a function of identities (i.e., building agency in the case of protest participants and gaining support in the case of the strikers). Similarly, Hornsey et al. (2006) argued that different groups expected and wanted to achieve different things by participating in a collective action event and this resulted in them considering different things as efficacious. Taking this argument one step further, our findings seem to indicate that a difference in goals would result in a difference in perceptions of success and failure as well, and that these goals were a function of social identities. From the beginning of the strike, the steel workers sought solidarity and the Mayday event showed them that this solidarity had largely been achieved; therefore, their experiences of the event were positive. On the other hand, protest participants aimed to build collective agency against austerity. Though their expectations varied from high to low, the interview data from after the event show that this agency was not built in the way that was hoped and that the interviewees' impressions of the Mayday event were negative.

Within the group of protesters, it seemed that people who had higher expectations before the event experienced disappointment more strongly than those whose expectations were closer to what actually happened. Generally, none among the protest participants was completely satisfied with the event, but those who expected less seemed to better cope with disappointment. A possible explanation for that could be that, perhaps, experienced activists may have access to the social and cultural resources to deal with such situations (such as arguments about 'losing the battle while winning the war'), whereas those less experienced with activism do not possess these resources and, therefore, define the events as failures (Barr & Drury, 2009).

Two further relatively novel aspects of the findings are worth noting. First, the perceived lack of organization at Mayday was in effect a failure to instantiate identity.

Participants did not come together at the demonstration to give them the ability to act in the way they would have hoped, based on their collective values and beliefs, and therefore the alien world of austerity remained unchanged after the demonstration. In this sense, the process was one of failure to realize the aims based on their shared social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987) i.e., failure of collective self-objectification; this is why it was disempowering and associated with negative emotion (Drury et al., 2005). Second, while the steelworkers always sought to garner support, and part of the stated aim of one of the events was precisely to provide such support, the experience of that support was so overwhelming for the steelworkers that it was experienced as an end in its own right, not as a mere means to furthering the aims of the strike.

We acknowledge that the present study has limitations. First, the sample was small and the fact that participants were recruited by snowballing raises questions about its representativeness. Second, the analysis was not subjected to any reliability tests and, thus, might be affected by the researchers' subjectivity. Though thematic analysis like other forms of qualitative analysis embraces such subjectivity (cf. Smith & Eatough, 2012), generalization of these findings would be problematic. On the other hand, there is no indication that these participants differed markedly from others who took part in the Mayday events; hence, the manner in which we presented the relationship between their participation and their notion of subjective power is plausible and reasonable. Third, there is the issue of translation and whether this could mean that some of the interviews' original meaning could have been lost or misinterpreted. To be more specific, the original interview schedule was drafted in English and then translated in Greek for the purposes of the research. The interview transcripts – which were in Greek – were then translated back to English by one of the researchers. It is not clear, however, that this undermines the claims we have made here. Fourth, we acknowledge the fact that we do not provide any credibility checks (Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999). Yet, the fact that our analysis was qualitative instead of quantitative allows us to present the readers with raw extracts from our data, so that they can judge for themselves whether the researchers' arguments are plausible or not. Finally, there is an issue of interview context that needs to be considered. The extracts presented in this paper reproduce only the interviewees' words; yet an interview is an interaction between two people. Not taking into account facts like the place where the interview occurred, or the interviewer's comments and specific phrasing of the questions might take the extracts out of context, and risk making interpretations of them less valid (Potter & Hepburn, 2005).

Taking the aforementioned limitations into account, we acknowledge that this study is mainly exploratory. However, we do believe that it offers some interesting directions for future research. The link between collective action and well-being could be further explored, perhaps with a survey study or an experiment. Furthermore, investigating the impact of (dis)organization in perceived success or failure of collective action and subsequent empowerment or disempowerment, for those that define their politics and their identities in terms of organization, could offer significant insight to existing models of collective action. Finally, given that participation was said by some participants to enhance their well-being, studying subjective power in contexts of despair and defeat might have practical applications in situations similar to that of Greece.

Conclusion

In the midst of the economic crisis, protests and riots have become part of our everyday lives. It would be only natural that academic interest in collective action processes would follow close by. Recent developments in collective action theory have indicated that engaging in protest can be psychologically consequential in numerous ways. What better time to test these developments than this time of tension – especially in Greece, of all places, the country that has most severely suffered the consequences of the crisis. However, previous research has examined subjective power mainly through the concept of efficacy, a theoretical construct with two very important limitations: it fails to capture the emotional and experiential aspects of empowerment and it has studied subjective power as a predictor rather than a result of collective action. The Mayday 2012 event in Athens provided an opportunity to address these limitations, through an interview study of both protest participants and strikers. Our findings showed that, for participants, the building of power could be an important goal in itself, thus indicating that, indeed empowerment can act as both a cause and an effect of collective action. Furthermore, participants linked feelings of power with hope and feelings of powerlessness with bitterness and despair; some references to general well-being were made as well. On the other hand, the steelworkers' data indicated the importance of support as source of feelings of empowerment, as well as how empowerment led to a psychological change and a need to satisfy it through social change as well. Although this study may have its limitations, we consider it to offer a view into the richness and diversity of the phenomenology of empowerment and we believe it shows that social psychology of collective action needs to re-conceptualize subjective power.

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