

Chapter 7

Portuguese Couples

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Authors' note

Introduction

Portugal is located in the very southwest of Europe with 10.525 million inhabitants, of which only 4% are foreigners. An average number of 2.6 persons per household, along with the fact that the most common family types are *couples with children* (43%) followed by *couples without children* (21%) (PORDATA, 2015a), clearly reveal the centrality of the couple's system. Portugal is a very homogeneous country concerning language (Portuguese), religion (Roman Catholic) and culture. In general, Portugal has been classified as a collectivist (in-group) country since people value close familiar and organizational bonds, as well as strong interpersonal relationships (Geert-Hofstede, 2015; Schoebi, Wang, Ababkov, & Perrez, 2010). Concerning family relations, Portuguese culture can be characterized by endorsing a *familialism* and *maternalism* model. For most Portuguese, marrying and having children is highly valued and viewed as a source of happiness, personal fulfilment and support, wherein women play a crucial role as mothers and caregivers (Aboim, 2007).

Despite this homogeneity, meanings associated with family changed dramatically (Aboim, 2013) in the last four decades. Nowadays, Portuguese couples' relationships are more egalitarian and partners share more decision making concerning family functioning than in former times. Nevertheless, both men and women frequently have contradictory family attitudes, oscillating between modern values and traditional values (Aboim, 2007). These contradictions are due to Portugal's particular historical and cultural pathway over the last century.

During nearly fifty years, the country had a right-wing dictatorship that ended with the April Revolution in 1974 (Wall, Cunha, & Marinho, 2013). This revolution catalysed and implemented fast ideological-socio-economic-political changes, which are still transforming mentalities and behaviours. Furthermore, the economic crisis of 2008 deeply hampered life conditions, making Portugal a difficult milieu for relationships to endure due to high levels of

stress and a scarcity of resources. Accordingly, the increased number of divorces (in 2013, 70% of marriages ended in divorce; PORDATA, 2015b) highlights Portuguese couples' vulnerability. They not only have to deal with challenges within the relationship (e.g., conflicts) but also need to manage numerous daily external stressors (work-family balance, financial difficulties), as well as major long-term adversities (e.g., unemployment, economic pressure) and unexpected life events (e.g., oncological disease, death of a child). Therefore, dyadic coping (DC), by acknowledging both partners interdependence and comprising partners' coping efforts to communicate their stress, mutually support each other, and their joint coping strategies to deal with adversities (e.g., Bodenmann, 2005, see chapter 1), is paramount to investigate and foster in the Portuguese context. Thus, this chapter aims to illustrate and discuss the role of DC in Portugal based on the systemic transaction model (STM; see chapter 1) to stress and coping.

Couples' Relationships in Portugal

From a STM perspective it is crucial to consider the evolution of the Portuguese culture because it sets the stage for understanding the interplay between the environment and the couples' stressors and coping behaviours. Therefore, in the following subsections, we address: (1) the contrast in work and family policies before and after the Revolution of 1974; (2) the "dominant culture" of Portuguese couples; (3) the major stressors affecting couples; and (4) the lack of resources Portuguese couples are struggling with.

From Dictatorship to Democracy: Work and Family Policies

During the right-wing Salazar dictatorship (1928-1974), pro-traditional family policies fostered a male breadwinner model emphasizing women's subordination to the patriarch authority and men's role as head of family and provider (Wall et al., 2013). Nevertheless, during this period, the mobilization of men to the colonial war along with high levels of emigration caused significant labour shortages. This forced Portuguese women to

enter the labour market significantly earlier and at higher levels than in the other southern European countries (Tavora & Rubery, 2013). The changes that occurred after the revolution, in terms of the legislation regarding family and gender equality policies, further encouraged women to enter in the labour force, promoting the model of a dual-earner couple (Amâncio, 2007). As a result, Portugal has a considerably high female employment rate (over 60% above the European Union [EU] average and the highest among southern European countries; Aboim, 2010a; Tavora & Rubery, 2013), and dual-earner couples with young children, both working full-time, have been a prevailing reality in the Portuguese society (Wall et al., 2013).

Changes in both the attitudes to family life and the economic behaviour of women have led to a continuing decline of the male breadwinner model (Aboim, 2010a). Family policies after the transition to democracy rejected earlier gender cultural models and promoted state responsibilities to support full-time working men and women, causing a slow but steady increase in parents' entitlements to leave schemes and in publicly subsidized services to support dual-earner couples with children. Altogether, these changes led to a combination of old and new trends in family forms and gender roles (Wall et al., 2013).

Dominant Couplehood Culture

Unfortunately, the growth of female employment and the expansion of a universal breadwinner model are not associated with significant changes in gender role attitudes in Portugal. The dominant informal gender culture still emphasizes the primacy of women as nurturers and child-rearers (Aboim, 2010a). In addition, research indicates that the division of domestic and care work in Portugal is among the most gender unequal in Europe (Aboim, 2010b). In the context of couples with a pre-school child, Portugal is the only European country showing an increase in the pattern of dual earner/highly unequal practices (Aboim, 2010a). These statistics clearly highlight a resilience of a traditional femininity in Portugal

and that women still have a 'second shift' when they arrive home from their paid work (Aboim, 2010a; Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2012).

More importantly, empirical evidence indicates a strong ambivalence in the Portuguese population, combining high support for traditional gender roles and motherhood-centred values, with a strong desire for greater participation of men in domestic and childcare responsibilities (Aboim, 2010a). Qualitative studies reveal a generalized consensus around the ideal of a caregiving father, and most men value the norm of the father who is involved in parenting and interacts with his children (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2012). However, a male breadwinner culture seems to persist in Portugal, and masculinity still appears to be equated with the ideal of men as family providers, despite the high rates of female full-time employment (Aboim, 2010a). The movement of women into the labour force has not resulted in an equivalent movement of men into the sharing of unpaid domestic and caregiving work (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2012) and attitudinal emphasis on the equal sharing of both paid and unpaid labour is not entirely reflected in actual practices (Aboim, 2010a).

Therefore, concerning family life, Portugal seems to be a country divided between values. On the one hand, there is a system of values related to a traditional conception of family (including the vision of women as mothers or the idea that children suffer when mothers work) that is still supported by a significant part of the Portuguese population. On the other hand, modern values emphasizing gender equality, the importance of women's participation in the labour market, or the acceptance of divorce are also common (Aboim, 2013; Amâncio, 2007). In fact, recent data shows that in terms of attitudes and values related to family life, Portuguese opinion is close to Scandinavian countries in some dimensions (e.g., being less conservative in terms of the notion that children can only be happy in a traditional two-parent family, and refusing the idea that being a housewife is rewarding for

women), yet similar to southern European countries in other aspects (e.g., regarding the fact that maternal employment has a negative impact on children's development) (Aboim, 2013).

Multiple Stressors

The influence of the Portuguese cultural context as explained above on couples' relationships is reflected in statistics regarding stress. Compared with other countries of the EU, Portugal has the highest levels of family stress (including the amount of domestic tasks and the lack of time to perform them, and feelings of tension while at home) and of work-family stress (related to work-family conflict, such as returning from work so tired that cannot perform domestic tasks or having concentration problems at work due to family responsibilities) (Guerreiro & Carvalho, 2007). This is particularly the case for Portuguese women, whose stress is significantly above the average of European women, presenting the highest scores in terms of family and work-family stress (Guerreiro & Carvalho, 2007).

Furthermore, as a result of the economic crisis which originated cuts in wages and increased the unemployment rate and low-paid precarious work contracts (PORDATA, 2015c), couples' stress increased exponentially. Indeed, Portugal is one of the European countries with the lowest yearly disposable income per household, the highest risk of poverty and the highest inequality of income distribution (EUROSTAT, 2014). A recent study conducted with a random sample of 2.230 Portuguese families, revealed important findings on how the severe economic problems are affecting individuals' mental health and family functioning. In particular, the study showed that: (1) one in each ten families lived in "real poverty", being unable to pay the house rent, water and electricity bills, and essential medical treatments; (2) since 2012, in 1/4 of these households, at least one of the family members had lost his/her job; (3) thirty per cent of the individuals was pessimist about the future and afraid that another family member would lose his/her job; (4) fifty per cent of the participants lived in a daily anxiety state, 21% had depressive symptoms, 17% had sleep problems, and one in

each ten individuals eventually considered suicide; and (5) more than 50% of participants stated that the crisis was causing family functioning problems (Defesa do Consumidor [DECO], 2013). More recently, empirical evidence revealed that Portuguese couples experience considerable levels of economic pressure, which was associated with higher levels of emotional stress (including depression, anxiety and hostility), decreasing marital satisfaction and increasing conflict between partners (Ferreira, Pedro, & Francisco, 2015).

Lack of Resources

Portuguese families struggle not only with multiple stressors (i.e., contradictory values, gender inequalities, work-life management, unemployment and low income) but also with a significant lack of resources that may hamper coping with stress. Specifically, this absence of resources is mostly present at four different levels: (1) lack of economic resources due to the economic crisis; (2) weak welfare policies supporting women's in work as well as couples in which one or both partners are unemployed; (3) overall lack of employment; and, interestingly, (4) lack of family support (Tavora & Rubery, 2013). In fact, results from a representative national survey exploring the social networks of support of families with children, showed that support was not always as extended and systematic as was thought for a country with a supposedly strong "family" tradition. In this study, nearly half of the Portuguese families reported a weak level of support (Aboim, Vasconcelos, & Wall, 2013). More interestingly, another national survey showed that most individuals selected partners as the most important person in their lives (Aboim et al., 2013). In similar lines, a recent daily diary study examining the support experiences of dual-earner parents across different cultural contexts, showed that Portuguese couples mainly expected and received support from their partners, and that couples' interdependence was very high (Schoebi et al., 2010).

Summary

Given the evidence abovementioned, it is plausible to assume that most Portuguese couples face multiple and chronic stressors (i.e., long lasting) which have serious implications at the individual, dyadic, familiar and societal level. More precisely, couples have to deal with different types of stressors at the same time, while struggling with limited resources. Frequently, the main resource is confined to the support received from the partner since support from extended networks (e.g., family and friends) is not as strong as it would be expected. Moreover, research has remained mostly focused on the individual's perception and non-dyadic data analyses of couple's data. Only recently, scholars (Vedes, Lind, & Lourenço, 2011) have started to proclaim that a STM approach to coping within couples was paramount to understand and help Portuguese couples cope more effectively with stress.

Couples' Coping with Stress

The relevance of DC in the Portuguese context is clearly supported by several studies. These studies were conducted with seven independent samples of heterosexual couples or individuals in a committed relationship coping with different types of stressors. In the following section, we present and discuss the main empirical findings by attending to diverse types of stress: overall external stress (stress from outside of the relationship), internal stress (stress from inside of the relationship) and major stressors (normative and non-normative critical life events). We chose this form of organization considering the multiple stressors Portuguese couples have to manage.

External Stress, Dyadic Coping and Couples Functioning

Consistent with several international studies (see chapter 1), when facing overall external stress¹, positive DC behaviours by Portuguese partners are related to better relational outcomes, while negative supportive behaviours, for both men and women, are associated

¹ It is important to mention that none of these studies measured stress independently. Thus, overall external stress means partner's global perception of stress with which they were trying to cope.

with worse outcomes. More specifically, in one study with 605 heterosexual individuals in a committed relationship (76% female), positive DC was associated with partners' better quality of sex, romance and passion; more constructive and less destructive conflict processes; high shared meaning and relationship satisfaction (Vedes, Nussbeck, Bodenmann, Lind, & Ferreira, 2013). In another study, with a sample of 427 heterosexual individuals in a committed relationship (66% females), positive DC was associated with partners' dyadic adjustment dimensions. That is, with high consensus (the degree of agreement on a number of issues or matters of importance to the relationship), cohesion (frequency of positive interactions, closeness and shared activities), satisfaction and affectional expression (the degree of agreement on how affection is expressed) (Ramalho, Ribeiro, & Pinto, 2015). Additionally, in two studies with different Portuguese samples (605 heterosexual committed individuals and 72 heterosexual couples), positive DC behaviours were associated with high relationship satisfaction by increasing we-ness (i.e., partners' perception of being more an interdependent unit, rather than two independent units) (Vedes, Bodenmann, Nussbeck, Randall, & Lind, 2015). Finally, in another study with 212 Portuguese couples with at least one adolescent child, positive DC was associated with less negative styles of family communication (e.g., family members blame each other when things go wrong) and with more family resources (i.e., strengths and adaptability to deal with things that are difficult for the family members) (Pedro & Francisco, 2015a).

The previous results are particularly noteworthy as they may underline Portuguese cultural characteristics. First, in the study of Vedes and colleagues (2013), a strong pattern of associations was mostly found between perceived emotion-focused supportive DC by the partner, partners' joint DC, and relational qualities. These findings are consistent with studies showing that collectivistic oriented cultures show more emotion-focused coping and common DC than cultures with a more individualistic orientation (see chapter 2). Second, in the study

of Vedes and colleagues (2015), the findings showed that in general, common DC was the most important form of DC, being positively associated with we-ness for both genders and we-ness strongly covaried with high relationship satisfaction. In addition, wives' outcomes were more strongly associated with their husbands' DC and we-ness than the opposite. From a cultural perspective, this study is particularly relevant given the role that interdependence plays in Portuguese couples (Aboim, 2006; Schoebi et al., 2010). Moreover, the differential findings for husbands and wives are in line with cultural research on intimate relationships showing that even in collectivistic cultures women tend to have a stronger interdependent self than men (Kuo, 2010), given their role as caregivers. This should be particularly true in the Portuguese context given the maternalism values that characterize Portuguese society.

In addition, Ramalho and colleagues (2015) not only replicated the sounder influence of perceived support from the partner and common DC on dyadic adjustment above other DC behaviours, but also found further interesting findings. First, positive DC by oneself was not associated with women's dyadic adjustment dimensions but it was associated with men's high consensus, satisfaction and affective expression. Considering Portuguese gender roles attitudes, these findings seem to suggest that when women support their partners, they may feel they are merely doing what is socially expected from them as family keepers. Therefore, women's positive DC does not affect their perception of dyadic adjustment facets. On the other hand, for men, supporting their partner may signify that they are meeting their partner's needs, thus perceiving more dyadic adjustment. Second, negative DC by the partner had a stronger effect on women's dyadic adjustment than for men. This suggests that women are more sensitive to their partner's negative supportive behaviours compared to men. One plausible explanation for this difference can be due to the high family and work-family stress that Portuguese women face, making them more susceptible to their partners' support.

Finally, the study of Pedro and Francisco (2015a) expanded the role of DC from the couple system to the family system, which is line with Portuguese familism model.

Gender and socio-demographic differences. Gender differences were found in some studies. Overall, women perceived themselves as communicating more stress, providing more positive DC (delegated and emotion-focused) than their partners, while men perceived their partners as communicating more stress and themselves as using more negative DC (Ramalho et al., 2015; Vedes et al., 2013, Vedes et al., 2015). These differences between men and women are consistent with the Portuguese collectivistic orientation, high-context communication style (see chapter 2) and gender role attitudes. In partnerships oscillating between equal and traditional gender roles, open communication of stress may occur less often among men because they may feel uncomfortable with seeking support, as they may still appraise it as “not being strong enough”. In addition, given women’s role as caregivers, support should be to a certain extent dependent on women’s capacity to decode their partners’ non-verbal behaviours, as well as on their own provision of support. Moreover, the fact that men provided more negative DC than women (see also chapter 1) and communicate less stress can also be explained by men’s socialization in Portugal. Men are still commonly seen as the “providers”, which could make them feel that they should solve problems by themselves, therefore communicating less stress to their partners. One can also hypothesise that, for the same reasons, men may also be less likely to offer support and even to minimize women’s complains, by thinking they should be better at solving and dealing with their own stressors.

Regarding socio-demographic differences, one study (Pires, 2011) revealed that couples with a high level of education (master or PhD) and living in urban areas, showed higher levels of positive DC (by oneself, partner and common). On the other hand, partners with lower levels of education (i.e., secondary school), presented higher scores on negative

DC behaviours. These findings align with sociology studies, which have shown that despite Portuguese cultural homogeneity, the social context and education matters (Aboim, 2006).

Internal Stress, Dyadic Coping and Family Functioning

Empirical evidence indicating high levels of family stress in Portuguese families, as well as the fact that both couplehood and parenthood are paramount for Portuguese couples, highlights the need to understand the role of DC in the association between couple and parent-child relationships in the Portuguese society. Accordingly, one national (Pedro, Ribeiro, & Shelton, 2012) and several international studies have shown the impact of the couple relationship (e.g., satisfaction, conflict) on parent-child interaction (for a review, see Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). Moreover, in a qualitative study conducted with twelve married Portuguese couples with pre-adolescent children, DC was reported as one of the main resources for parents to avoid the spillover of stress from the couple relationship into the parent-child subsystems (Pedro, 2012). In another study, Pedro and Francisco (2015b) showed that DC had a mediating role in the association between open marital conflict (to which the adolescents were exposed), parental emotional support and adolescents' adjustment. The findings indicated that couples' conflict was associated with less parental emotional support, by decreasing the capacity of providing and perceiving positive support, preventing partners' efforts to deal with stress, and especially, by increasing one's provision of ambivalent, superficial and hostile support. Furthermore, direct effects were also found between DC and adolescents' emotional adjustment (externalization and internalization behaviour), such that higher positive DC by oneself and the partner, as well as common DC, were associated with higher levels of adolescent's adjustment. Altogether, these findings clearly suggest the negative impact of internal stress on couples' resources to perform as parents, highlighting the role of DC as an important protective factor that decreases the impact of couple conflict on parent-child interaction and adolescents' emotional adjustment.

Major Stressors, Dyadic Coping and Couples functioning

Portuguese couples not only have to deal with external and internal stressors but also with major stressors.

Economic pressure. Economic pressure represents the painful experiences created by hardship conditions such as being unable to purchase basic goods or pay monthly bills (Conger, Rueter, & Elder, 1999; Conger et al., 2002). The impact of economic pressure on couples' conflict and psychological distress is well established in the literature of family studies (e.g., Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Conger et al., 1999). Moreover, as explained above, economic pressure is particularly high in the Portuguese context, especially since the economic crisis of 2008, having negative effects on couple and family functioning (Ferreira et al., 2015). Considering the lack of studies in Portugal using the STM approach to economic stress, Pedro and Francisco (2015c) investigated the mediating role of DC between economic pressure, couples' conflict and partners' psychological distress (depressed mood, anxiety and angry or hostile feelings). Findings revealed that higher economic pressure was associated with higher levels of couples' conflict and psychological distress, by increasing both self and partner negative DC. These results are in line with the cascade model of Bodenmann (see chapter 1) showing that high external chronic stress decreases couples' individual and dyadic resources. Interestingly, gender differences were not found between men and women in what concerns economic pressure, suggesting that in a country marked by dual-earner couples this type of stressor may be appraised as shared. Considering the financial crisis affecting Portugal, these findings may also indicate that the economic pressure experienced by both partners is so severe that prevents them to support one another in an effective way, and cope with stress in a conjoint manner. Consequently, when facing economic pressure, Portuguese couples use negative forms of DC, which in turn contribute to increase conflict in the couple's relationship. Moreover, although previous studies with Portuguese couples indicate

that women tend to provide more support to partners than men (Ramalho et al., 2015; Vedes et al., 2013, Vedes et al., 2015), this does not seem to be the case for financial stress. We may speculate that the high levels of economic pressure experienced by women unable them to provide the positive DC support consistent with their role of nurturers and family caregivers in the Portuguese culture.

Death of a child. The death of a child is perhaps the most traumatic event a parent could go through (Wheeler, 2001) and the negative impact in several dimensions of parents' lives and relationship domains is well-established. In Portugal, 295 children under one year old and 334 children and adolescents died in 2012 (World Health Organization [WHO], 2015). Although these numbers are relatively lower than those reported in the year 2000 (deaths of children under one year old = 567; death of children and adolescents 1-19 years old = 726) (WHO, 2015), they remain, nevertheless, high. The death of a child is often a shared stressor for both parents, as they must address not only the impact of the death as individuals, but also the changes to their relationship as a couple (Rando, 2000). After the death of an offspring, the spouse is commonly the primary source of support of the father/mother in grief, and there is sound evidence attesting the importance of the couple relationship to parents' individual adjustment (e.g., Lang, Gottlieb, & Ansel, 1996; Song, Floyd, Seltzer, Greenberg, & Hong, 2010). Nevertheless, existing research has traditionally examined how parents adjust to the death of a child from an individual perspective and the interpersonal context in which parental grieving occurs has been only scarcely considered (Stroebe, Schut, & Finkenauer, 2013).

In a country with a familial and maternalism cultural background, such as Portugal, the STM approach to understand coping with the death of a child as a joint endeavour should be particularly relevant. In accordance, Albuquerque, Pereira and Narciso (2015) examined the mediating role of DC between grief and individual and dyadic adjustment in a sample of

152 parents with a deceased child (58.6% male). Findings showed that lower levels of grief were significantly associated with higher joint DC, which in turn was associated with better dyadic adjustment. Although marginally significant, parents' grief response was also significantly associated with lower depression, better quality of life and dyadic adjustment, through higher positive DC by the partner. These findings suggest that common DC may be a potential mechanism through which the grief response of parents facing the shared loss of a child affects dyadic adjustment, and have important implications for interventions with these parents because after the death of a child parents are often deprived of their individual resources (Rosenblatt, 2000). In agreement with a cultural background marked by a fusion between women's identity and motherhood (Amâncio, 2007), mothers scored higher on grief, depressive and anxiety symptoms, and lower on quality of life than fathers. In addition, mothers' individual adjustment was more strongly associated with DC behaviours, than for fathers' (Albuquerque et al., 2015).

Breast cancer. Breast cancer (BC) is the most common oncological disease in the female population and the medical condition with the highest number of survivors worldwide. In Portugal, with a female population of five million, there are 4.500 new cases of BC per year, i.e., 11 new cases per day, and four women dying daily because of this disease (Bastos, Barros, & Lunet, 2007; Direcção-Geral de Saúde [DGS], 2013b). Although most women diagnosed with BC (stage I-III) survive their disease (Bastos et al., 2007; DGS, 2013b), the cancer experience embodies considerable intra- and interpersonal challenges. Given the interdependence that characterizes an intimate relationship, BC is considered a dyadic stressor that can affect both partners individually and collectively as a couple. Research shows the importance of couples dealing with cancer as a "we-disease" (Kayser, Watson, & Andrade, 2007), particularly in cultures in which interdependence is valued (Kayser et al., 2014), as well as that DC is a key process involved in the adjustment of both

partners facing BC (e.g., Heinrichs et al., 2012). Unfortunately, an individual approach to this disease prevails in the Portuguese context; being cross-cutting to all the involved systems, such as the National Health System and couples themselves (Patrão, Neves, Paul, & Santos Rita, 2014). Moreover, in a country where women have the role of caregivers it can be particularly difficult for women to be cared for, even when they are ill, and for men to adapt to the change of roles.

Aiming to provide the first steps for Portuguese BC couples cope with the disease as a unit, Patrão and colleagues (2014) conducted a qualitative study using focus group methodology with eight couples' BC survivors ($N = 16$ participants; 50-55 years old), in order to adapt the *Couples Coping Enhancement Training* (CCET; Bodenmann & Shantinath, 2004) to Portuguese couples' BC survivors needs. Results revealed the necessity to include in the CCET training the cancer-related survivorship worries: (1) physical function and daily home activities; (2) cancer-related communication; (3) body image related to sexuality and intimacy; (4) instrumental support related to children care; and (5) management of stress related to employees and financial changes (Patrão, 2014b). This study provides a first step for the adaption of a survival care plan to Portuguese couples with breast cancer.

Implications for Practice

Grounded in all the research conducted in Portugal, using a STM approach to stress and coping, we *again* (cf. Vedes et al., 2011) reiterate that positive DC skills should be promoted with Portuguese couples and families, while attending to its contextual and stress specificities. Interventions based on the STM approach, such as the CCET, the Coping-Oriented Couples Therapy (COCT; see Bodenmann, 2007), and TOGETHER, for couples coping with financial strain (see Falconier, 2014), have great potential to fit both Portuguese couples' and clinicians needs as well as future program and policy markers' measures.

Concerning couples' and clinicians' needs, STM-derived interventions, have high potential because they focus on stress and coping issues that can unite partners against a common enemy outside of their relationship, and seem to be particularly attractive to men (Bodenmann & Shantinath, 2004). This factor is crucial as Portuguese attitudes on looking for help are often sceptical and, specifically, regarding couples' relationships, the famous Portuguese proverb "Entre marido e mulher ninguém mete a colher" (Between husband and wife, no one puts the spoon) is a hallmark. Second, the CCET further addresses coping at the individual level, long with issues related to mutual fairness, equity, and respect, as well as to dyadic communication. These facets can be particularly important for Portuguese couples. On the one hand, better individual coping could help reduce both partners' negative DC behaviours when dealing with different types of stressors (e.g., conflict and economic pressure) and their negative effect on children. On the other hand, fostering equal relationships along with dyadic communication skills is important because Portuguese couples often struggle with gender roles, division of care and housework contradictions and/or inequalities. Third, the CCET, in particular, exists in a DVD format. If adapted to the Portuguese context, it could afford efficient low cost self-direct approaches (see Bodenmann, Hilpert, Nussbeck, & Bradbury, 2014) and respect flexibility within the "culture" of each couple. Moreover, its adaptation for couples facing financial stress (TOGETHER; Falconier, 2014) is particularly relevant given the high number of Portuguese families facing economic challenges and pressure. TOGETHER not only decreases financial strain and its harmful effects on the individual (reducing anxiety and depression) and the couples' relationship (decreasing negative communication and fostering relationship satisfaction), but it also promotes couples' financial management skills (Falconier, 2014). In addition, interventions aimed to foster DC at the workplace should be implemented given the high levels of work-family stress in Portugal. Fourth, all STM-derived approaches aimed to foster not only better

coping but also couples' we-ness. Fostering partners' we-ness seems therefore vital in the Portuguese context, since the partner is the main source of support and interdependence is dominant in Portuguese couples (Aboim, 2006; Schoebi et al, 2010). Fifth, as our findings suggest, supportive behaviours are crucial for couples and partners adjustment when facing more general stressors, but also major stressors, such as economic pressure, the death of a child and breast cancer. Thus, clinicians and health-care workers could integrate in their work measures of stress and DC (see Dyadic Coping Inventory in Portuguese, Vedes et al., 2013) and progressively foster couples' DC behaviours. Importantly, evidence-based principals and methods are available, and therefore could be easily adapted (e.g., CCET manual, *the three-phase method*; Bodenmann, 2007). Based on the national and international empirical evidence of the STM, we suggest that program and policy makers' may consider funding research to attest the validity of the STM-derived interventions in Portugal in DVD format and/or on-line platform. The media and key "actors" in the Portuguese cultural context could divulge and publicize it, such as, family doctors, hospitals, and centres of the Institute of Employment.

Implications for Research

Considering the Portuguese studies and the cultural specificities previously mentioned, four main lines for further research seem paramount. First, given the prevalence of economic stressors in Portugal and the contradictory gender findings in the literature, future studies should extend research regarding the role of DC in the spillover of economic stress to partners' well-being and relational outcomes, by considering gender roles. More specifically, cross-cultural studies comparing gender-equal countries (e.g., Scandinavian countries) and countries with more traditional gender roles (e.g., South European countries) could provide important clues to understand the patterns between these variables. Moreover, economic pressure studies in Portugal should control for work-family stress, division of

domestic and care labour, as well as parenting variables. This research will help to disentangle the impact of gender role characteristics, on the one hand, and the impact of different stressors that seem to affect a culture with unequal gender role values such as the one in Portugal, on the other hand. Second, research could explore the role of DC behaviours in comparison with other variables (e.g., coparenting) known to mediate the spillover of couple stress to parent-child interaction. This would inform if DC is a stronger buffer for this type of mechanism, as national research showing direct effects of couple's DC on adolescent's adjustment suggested. Third, the above-mentioned lines of research should further explore actor and partner effects to better understand crossover mechanisms between partners. Finally, future research should expand the study of the DC to other relevant family contexts/stressors in Portugal, such as, homosexual couples and couples coping with HIV.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we addressed the role of a STM approach to DC in the Portuguese Cultural context. Overall, Portugal is a country with a collectivistic orientation characterized by (1) a strong familialism and maternalism focus; (2) contradictory values on gender roles and work-life management as well as on child and house care; (3) predominance of dual-earner couples; (4) multiple stressors; and (5) high levels of internal and external stress. Therefore, in Portugal, DC behaviours play a crucial role not only for couples' functioning, but also for family functioning in general and at the parent-child level, as well as for adolescents' adjustment. Furthermore, DC is relevant for couples when dealing with overall external stressors, with intra-dyadic stressors as well as with major stressors, such as, economic pressure, death of a child and breast cancer. Since interdependence within Portuguese couples is very valued and the partner is the most important source of support, interventions aimed to foster DC can be paramount, because they promote couples dyadic coping behaviours and we-ness against a common enemy: stress.

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