Gender differences in school-family conflict and school-family enrichment in nontraditional
Portuguese students

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Abstract

In recent years, higher education institutions have made efforts to attract people who are either in the labor market or unemployed to the educational system. Accordingly, the participation of nontraditional students in postsecondary education has been increasing over the years in Portugal, including working students and working student parents. This growing phenomenon has received relatively little empirical attention since few country-level studies have been conducted targeting the combination of school with other life roles with a nontraditional student population enrolled in postsecondary education. The current study investigates the combination of school with other life roles for nontraditional Portuguese students enrolled in postsecondary education. Participants were 73 working student parents (enrolled in full-time undergraduate programs). Structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis was used to test the model. The coexistence of school-family conflict and school-family enrichment was found. Gender differences on the antecedent variables of school-family conflict and enrichment were also found, emphasizing the advantage in examining conflict and enrichment experiences simultaneously and by gender when investigating school and family relations. Implications of the findings and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: nontraditional students; school-family conflict; school-family enrichment, postsecondary education

Introduction

In spite of increasing participation rates in higher education in Portugal since the 1970s, in particular since the end of dictatorship in 1974, many educational indicators remain far below other European countries (Amaral & Fonseca, 2012): for instance, in Portugal in 2008, 81% of employed people had less than a secondary education (compared with 28% in the European Union), and the percentage of the adult population ages 25 to 64 with a tertiary education was 14% (compared with 28% for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] average, and 25% for the European Union; Amaral & Fonseca, 2012). Furthermore, statistics suggest that the recent massification of higher education and Bologna Declaration changes have led to not only a diversification of options, but also to their social stratification and territorial dispersion and, thus, the admission and maintenance of higher education in Portugal still faces many economic, social, and cultural barriers (Fonseca, Encarnação, & Justino, 2014; Fonseca, Tavares, Sá, & Amaral, 2014).

The structure for higher education in Portugal, like in other European countries, is framed by the Bologna Declaration. There are two cycles of studies: first cycle (undergraduate) and second cycle (postgraduate), with the first cycle of studies lasting a minimum of three years (European Higher Education Area, 1999). Since the Bologna Declaration was implemented in Europe, higher education institutions have made an effort to widen participation rates, particularly in the first cycle, of underrepresented groups, including nontraditional learners from diverse ages, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds who look for improved opportunities for employment and socioeconomic mobility (Butcher, Corfield, & Rose-Adams, 2012; Devas, 2011). Women, lower socioeconomic groups, ethnic minorities, and mature adults have been the four key target groups for the widening participation of postsecondary education movement (Tight, 2012). In following this European trend, national educational policies (e.g., special assessment exams and, for those who are 23 years old or older, evening and weekend programs, part-time program enrollment) were implemented in Portugal in order to widen the participation of nontraditional students, including working students and working student parents (those with dependent children) in undergraduate postsecondary education (Amorim, Azevedo, & Coimbra, 2010). Overall, these measures targeting nontraditional students have been successfully implemented and the numbers of nontraditional students enrolled in the first cycle of higher education have been slowly increasing in Portugal (Amorim et al., 2010; Martins, Mauritti, & Costa, 2005; Rosário et al., 2014). Although some research has examined the long-term benefits of postsecondary education from the nontraditional students' perspectives (Oliveira & Temudo, 2008), the potential negative and positive impacts resulting from simultaneous participation in postsecondary education alongside other life roles remain understudied in Portuguese nontraditional students. The purpose of this study is to build on existing work-family conflict and enrichment literature and definitions within the school-family context (e.g., van Rhijn & Lero, 2009) to understand the antecedents of school-family conflict and enrichment in a sample of nontraditional student parents in Portugal. Enrollment in postsecondary education does not result in uniformly positive benefits for everyone (Devas, 2011; Gilardi & Chiara, 2011; Ogren, 2003). In fact, attempts to “do it all”—that is, to raise children while working and attending a full-time

postsecondary program—can lead to inter-role conflicts (Adams & Corbett, 2010; Andrade, 2016; Ogren, 2003; Oliveira & Temudo, 2008). Indeed, the potential time demands of student life might reduce time these students are able to spend with their partners and children and can lead to negative family and personal outcomes. If this is true for both male and female students, gender roles that often ascribe most of the burden of the household chores and child care to women can make the task of combining several roles even more complex for female students (Sweet & Moen, 2007). Indeed, mothers attending postsecondary programs often feel conflict over the short-term sacrifices versus long-term gains for their families and stress from competing demands of familial and school roles (Oliveira & Temudo, 2008; van Rhijn, 2014; Zaleski, Levey-Thors, & Schiaffino, 1998).

On the positive side, enrollment in postsecondary education can also bring benefits at both the personal and family level. Enrollment in postsecondary education can lead nontraditional students to invest in or add value to their careers with an additional graduation, and can be an opportunity to acquire a qualification that allows access to previously unattainable employment opportunities (Adams & Corbett, 2010; Oliveira & Temudo, 2008). This experience has also been described as fulfilling a “dream” that was put away due to either professional or familial responsibilities, and so is defined as an enriching experience (Adams & Corbett, 2010; Ogren, 2003).

Since the relationship between postsecondary education and family outcomes is not straightforward, this study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the negative and positive aspects involved in combining student and familial roles using both conflict and enrichment perspectives. Based on the school-family interaction model by van Rhijn and Lero (2009), the purpose of this study is to examine an integrative model of school-family conflict and school-family enrichment (see Figure 1). Since research with student mothers found that combining several roles is more complex for female students than for their male counterparts (Sweet & Moen, 2007; Zaleski et al., 1998), the model will be tested separately for male and female students. The specific hypotheses that are examined in this study are as follows:

- H1: Academic self-efficacy will be negatively correlated with school-family conflict and positively correlated with school-family enrichment.
- H2: School peers’ support will be negatively correlated with school-family conflict and positively correlated with school-family enrichment.
- H3: School role salience will be positively correlated with school-family conflict and school-family enrichment.
- H4: School time commitment will be positively correlated with school-family conflict and school-family enrichment.
- H5: Satisfaction with school will be negatively correlated with school-family conflict and positively correlated with school-family enrichment.

Figure 1. Conceptual model.

An examination of the literature that supported the development of each of these hypotheses is provided in the subsequent section.

Theoretical Perspectives in the School-Family Literature

School-Family Conflict

Work-family conflict theories state that demands from work impact the quality of parenting and quality of life (Mullen, Kelley, & Kelloway, 2008). Work-family conflict is defined as a bidirectional process where conflict between work and family roles results from incompatible demands (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Three forms of conflict have been identified and include time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based conflict (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000). Time-based conflict occurs when time devoted to one role takes away from time in another role; strain-based conflict occurs when strain experienced in one role intrudes into another role (Carlson et al., 2000; Voydanoff, 2005). Finally, behavior-based conflict occurs when specific behaviors required for one role are incompatible with behaviors required for another role. These stressors are also present for student parents. In a similar way, school-family conflict can be defined as a conflict between school and family roles resulting from demands that are difficult to reconcile. Thus, the three types of conflict conceptualized for work-family conflict are also applicable to the school-family context (van Rhijn & Lero, 2009).

Research on the integration of family and school demands points out that these students have to negotiate their occupational and familial goals on a daily basis, and this can create inter-role conflicts (Adams & Corbett, 2010; Ogren, 2003). The number of ongoing responsibilities involved in the multiple roles of working student parents can lead them to experience role strain,

difficulties in time management, and challenges finding a balance between their roles, and these are common issues for student parents (van Rhijn, 2014; van Rhijn, Lero, Bridge, & Fritz, 2016).

School-Family Enrichment

Work-family enrichment is defined as the “extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role” (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006, p.73) and, as for school-family conflict, it is also considered to be a bidirectional process. The focus is put on resources or assets in a particular domain that can be used to cope better with the role in the other domain, resulting in positive impacts on overall performance and positive affect (i.e., improvements in the quality of life). Positive outcomes of work-family enrichment include improved mental health and overall well-being (Hanson, Hammer, & Colton, 2006). Recent studies have supported this line of thought by claiming that it is the quality of experiences within role contexts, rather than occupying a number of roles per se, that is the most important predictor of life satisfaction (Haggag, Geser, Ostermann, & Schusterschitz, 2011; Kulik, Shilo-Levin, & Liberman, 2015). In addition, empirical evidence provides support that the benefits of being involved in multiple roles far outweigh tensions resulting from inter-role conflict (Ahrens & Ryff, 2006). Adapting the definition of work-family enrichment, van Rhijn and Lero (2009) claim that school-family enrichment is defined as the extent to which experiences in the school role improve the quality of life in the other role, namely the family role. Furthermore, the authors showed that being able to balance family and school roles accounts for a perception of family to school enrichment (van Rhijn & Lero, 2014).

Antecedents of School-Family Conflict and School-Family Enrichment

Academic self-efficacy. Researchers have demonstrated that both personal and school factors influence the school adaptation and successful careers of nontraditional students during postsecondary education (Bye, Pushkar, & Conway, 2007; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Hammer, Grigsby, & Woods, 1998; Home, 1998). For personal factors, Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005) found a link between self-efficacy beliefs and academic success, where self-efficacy beliefs were found to be a strong predictor of academic success for nontraditional students. Self-efficacy, as defined within social cognitive career theory, is related to beliefs that enhance individuals’ willingness to initiate specific behaviors, persistence, and emotional reactions in the face of barriers and conflicts (Bandura, 1986). Social cognitive career theory emphasizes the interrelations between cognitive and behavioral variables and context, where context refers to gender, barriers, and support systems, among others. In fact, student parents with high student self-efficacy have been found to experience less psychological distress and have higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction than “regular” students (Quimby & O’Brien, 2006). Several meta-analyses confirm the robustness of the self-efficacy construct as a predictor of future performance in a wide range of life domains (Gwaltney, Metrik, Kahler, & Shiffman, 2009; Holden, 1991; Holden, Moncher, Schinke, & Barker, 1990). Informed by previous and vicarious experiences and by social persuasion and emotional states, self-efficacy beliefs are context-specific and play an important role in predicting and explaining motivational,

cognitive, emotional, and decision processes (Bandura, 2006a, 2006b). The predictive power of self-efficacy on persistence, success, and well-being is particularly relevant and established for academic (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991; van Rhijn & Lero, 2014; Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006) and work-related domains (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Therefore, we hypothesize that academic self-efficacy will be negatively correlated with school-family conflict and positively correlated with school-family enrichment.

School Peers' Support

Several studies document that nontraditional students typically spend less time in college activities than regular students and this can affect their social interaction with colleagues (Ogren, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Despite this, Van Stone, Nelson, and Niemann (2004) found that enrollment in postsecondary education improved students' social networks. In addition, support from school peers has been found to account for academic success and overall satisfaction with the academic experience, especially for student mothers (Ogren, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Other studies have found that formal and informal peer support and modeling seem to play an important role in improving students' satisfaction, social integration, and academic success (Clark, Andrews, & Gorman, 2013; Sanchez, Bauer, & Paronto, 2006). Research with working students has demonstrated that social support from peers acted as a buffer against strains related to combining work and school (Andrade, 2016; Wyland, Lester, Mone, & Winkel, 2013). Thus, we hypothesize that school peers' support will be negatively correlated with school-family conflict and positively correlated with school-family enrichment.

School Role Salience

Based on the work-family literature, the more importance that is attributed to either the work or family role, the more time and energy will be devoted to that role, allowing for less time and energy for the individual's other roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Previous research with mature student parents by van Rhijn (2014) found that pursuing a lifelong goal added motivation to learn, and to be role models to their children to successfully complete school. This reflects the salience of the school role for these mature student parents, and they also reported they made sacrifices—such as missing time with family—in order to complete schoolwork-related tasks (Oliveira & Temudo, 2008; van Rhijn, 2014). Based on these findings, we hypothesize that school role salience will be positively correlated with school-family conflict and school-family enrichment.

School Time Commitment

Time pressures are often related with the perception of incompatibility among roles (Ogren, 2003). In fact, since time is a limited resource, time commitment to one role takes away time needed for other roles (Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997), and this can be an important antecedent of inter-role conflicts (Home, 1998; Sweet & Moen, 2007). Results from studies with mature student parents by van Rhijn (2014) and van Rhijn and colleagues (2016) indicate that, to

achieve balance between school and family roles, student parents report missing classes or devoting less time to schoolwork or to study. In line with these findings, we hypothesize that school time commitment will be positively correlated with school-family conflict and school-family enrichment.

Satisfaction With School

Among nontraditional students such as student parents, perceived satisfaction with the school role has been linked with intrinsic motivation to learn (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002), and with reports of feeling happy and stimulated by school (van Rhijn, 2014). Thus, being satisfied with the school role can be important for student parents in adjusting to their school and family roles by creating positive affect toward the student experience which, in turn, can enrich their family life. Accordingly, we hypothesize that satisfaction with school will be negatively correlated with school-family conflict and positively correlated with school-family enrichment.

Work-Family Conflict and Work-Family Enrichment: Testing an Integrative Model

Based on the school-family interaction model by van Rhijn and Lero (2009), an integrative model of school-family and school-family enrichment was tested. As suggested by the authors, conflict and enrichment can co-occur and the specific antecedents of each of these outcomes was tested in the model according to the specific hypotheses. Figure 1 depicts the proposed theoretical model.

Since gender roles often ascribe most of the burden of the family demands (e.g., household chores and child care) to women, research has consistently established that Portuguese women face more difficulties than men to balance the roles of work and family (Matias, Andrade, & Fontaine, 2011; Matias, Andrade, & Fontaine, 2012). Studies with student mothers have also found that combining several roles is more complex for female students than for their male counterparts (Sweet & Moen, 2007; Zaleski et al., 1998). Based on this evidence, the model was tested separately for male and female students.

Method

Participants

A paper-and-pencil-based survey was completed by 73 nontraditional students, working student parents, with one or more dependent child under 18 years of age, who were enrolled in the second semester of a first cycle (i.e., undergraduate) program in a higher education institution in Portugal (87% of the students were enrolled in an evening program and 13% in the daytime program). The sample comprised 42 women and 31 men who were enrolled as full-time students in different undergraduate social science programs. Full-time enrollment (100% of course load) was used as a criterion to participate in the study to ensure that all the students were exposed to the same workload concerning their school classes; full-time enrollment consisted of 20 hours per week in their courses; depending on the program this involves attending five or six courses. All participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that confidentiality would be

maintained. Participants were recruited after classes and requested to voluntarily take part in a research study that would investigate how participation in postsecondary education affects family life. The participants' ages ranged from 24 to 53 ($M = 37.9$; $SD = 2.40$). Number of children ranged from one to three (average age of children was 1.3 years old) and their ages ranged from nine months to 18 years old. Most of the participants were either married or in a common-law relationship (96%) and 73% reported working in a full-time job (and were enrolled in an evening program) for a significant number of hours alongside their academic studies ($M = 30.51$; $SD = 5.29$).

Measures

School-Family Conflict. The School-Family Conflict Scale (van Rhijn & Lero, 2009), adapted from the Work-Family Conflict Scale by Carlson and colleagues (2000), was used. This is an 18-item scale using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Three subscales, with three items each, were used in this study: time-based school interference with family, strain-based school interference with family, and behavior-based school interference with family. The Cronbach alpha for this scale was .85. A sample item is "My school keeps me from my family activities more than I would like."

School-Family Enrichment. The School-Family Enrichment Scale (van Rhijn & Lero, 2009), adapted from the Work-Family Enrichment Scale by Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne, and Grzywacz (2006), was used. The scale consists of six subscales, but only three were used for this study: school-to-family development, school-to-family affect, and school-to-family capital (the family-to-school subscales were not used). It is an 18-item self-report scale using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The Cronbach alpha for the scale was .81. A sample item is "School helps me to understand different viewpoints and this helps me be a better family member."

School Role Salience. School role salience was measured using two items (van Rhijn & Lero, 2009) using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The two items were "Going to school gives me a strong feeling of satisfaction" and "School is a very important part of my life." The Cronbach alpha for this scale was .78.

School Time Commitment. Participants were asked to estimate, for an average week, the number of hours spent doing specific tasks (e.g., total of attending classes/labs/practicum and studying or working on assignments/course components).

School Peers' Support. An adapted version by van Rhijn and Lero (2009) of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988) was used to assess perceptions of the adequacy of social support from friends, family, and significant others. It is a 12-item self-report scale rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from very strongly disagree (1) to very strongly agree (7). For the purposes of this study, participants answered the items of the Friends subscale referring to friends and peers available at school. The Cronbach alpha for this subscale was .87. A sample item is "I have students available whom I can depend on when I have a problem."

Satisfaction With School. One subscale of Alfonso, Allison, Rader, and Gorman's (1996) Extended Satisfaction With Life Scale (ESWLS) was used for use in this study: School Satisfaction. It consisted of five items measured on a 7-point scale ranging from very strongly disagree (1) to very strongly agree (7). The Cronbach alpha for the scale was .89. A sample item is "I am satisfied with my school life."

All the scales were translated into Portuguese, analyzed, and back-translated to English, and compared to the original version.

Analytic Strategy

The current study was conducted using path analysis. The goal of a path analysis is to test theoretically hypothesized relationships and the direction of influence of those relationships (McDonald & Ho, 2002). A path analysis was conducted by testing the hypothesized model through examining the relationships of the antecedent variables, school time commitment, academic self-efficacy, school role salience, and satisfaction with school with school-family conflict and school-family enrichment (as illustrated in Figure 1). Following the recommendations of Kline (2011), the overall fit of the hypothesized model was evaluated based on the following set of indices and their reference values for an acceptable fit: ratio $\chi^2/df < 5$ (Arbuckle, 2008); Bentler comparative fit index (CFI) > 0.90 (Hu & Bentler, 1999); root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) < 0.08 (Arbuckle, 2008); and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) < 0.10 (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Results

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations (SDs), and intercorrelations among the study variables.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations (*SD*).

Variables	Mean	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. School-family conflict	3.21	1.21	-					
2. School-family enrichment	2.41	1.15	.21	-				
3. School role salience	3.52	1.84	.32**	.32	-			
4. Academic self-efficacy	4.23	1.08	.45**	.55*	.11	-		
5. Satisfaction with school	4.21	1.33	.55**	.17	.29	.16	-	
6. School peers support	3.32	1.81	.23	.23	.17	.25	.22	-

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

To test the hypothesized model and relative contribution of each antecedent variable to the two outcome variables, school-family conflict and school-family enrichment, path analysis was used. The model computed for female students showed an acceptable fit ($\chi^2/df = 7.234$, $p < .001$, RSMEA = .02, CFI = .92). The model accounted for the following amounts of variance in the endogenous variables: 78% of the variance of female students' school-family conflict and 78% of the variance of women's school-family enrichment. The model computed for male students also showed an acceptable fit ($\chi^2/df = 8.453$, $p < .001$, RSMEA = .04, CFI = .82), and

accounted for 79% of the variance of male students' school-family conflict and 70% of the variance of male students' school-family enrichment.

Figure 2 displays the path model as hypothesized in this research study with the significant standardized path coefficients between variables for both samples.

Figure 2. Path model (with standardized estimates) for female and male students (in parentheses).

Note. ns = nonsignificant. $*p < .01$. $**p < .001$.

In the female students' model academic self-efficacy is negatively related ($\beta = -.32$, $p < .001$) to school-family conflict and positively related with school-family enrichment ($\beta = .55$, $p < .001$), school peers' support is positively related with school-family enrichment ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$), and satisfaction with school is negatively related with school-family conflict ($\beta = -.32$, $p < .001$). School time commitment did not show a significant relation either with school-family conflict or school-family enrichment. School satisfaction was not related with school-family enrichment and school role salience was neither related with school-family conflict or school-family enrichment.

In male students' model, academic self-efficacy is negatively related ($\beta = -.56$, $p < .001$) to school-family conflict and positively related with school-family enrichment ($\beta = .49$, $p < .001$). School peers' support did not significantly influence either school-family conflict or school-family enrichment. School satisfaction was negatively related with school-family conflict ($\beta = -.35$, $p < .001$). School role salience showed a significant negative relation ($\beta = -.13$, $p < .001$) with school-family conflict and no significant relation with school-family enrichment. School time commitment did not show a significant relation with school-family conflict or school-family enrichment. Thus, it is not depicted in Figure 2.

Discussion

Research on the consequences of adding an extra role, the student role, to the familial role is limited (Sweet & Moen, 2007) and an integrative model relating both negative and positive outcomes of combining these roles was lacking. This study aimed to fill this gap by testing an integrative model of the antecedents of school-family conflict and school-family enrichment with a sample of nontraditional Portuguese students enrolled in postsecondary education. Furthermore, this study focused on gender differences. This is an important consideration because gender is based on culture and learned behavior with impacts on familial roles (Matias et al., 2011; Matias et al., 2012). This study provides a unique perspective through which we can develop a deeper understanding of the importance of school dimensions on female and male students' experiences of school-family conflict and school-family enrichment.

Antecedents of School-Family Conflict

The results of the current study point to importance of academic self-efficacy as a significant negative predictor of school-family conflict for both female and male subsamples. These results are in line with previous studies that suggest that adult learners may have high self-efficacy beliefs and intrinsic motivation to learn (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002), and this can act as a buffer for the perception of conflicts between school and family roles. Moreover, research by van Rhijn and Lero (2014) found that self-efficacy beliefs influenced positively student parents' perceived capacity to properly manage multiple roles (i.e., school and family roles). The current findings suggest a similar relationship for these nontraditional Portuguese participants since, for both female and male students, academic self-efficacy was negatively related with school-family conflict.

Another significant negative predictor of school-family conflict was satisfaction with school. Previous research with student parents showed that perceived satisfaction with the school has been linked with academic success (Zajacova et al., 2005), intrinsic motivation to learn (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002), and reports of feeling happy and stimulated by school (van Rhijn, 2014). Thus, being satisfied with the school role can be important for nontraditional students in adjusting to their school and family roles, diminishing the perception of conflict between the demands of school and family as predicted.

School role salience was found to be a significant negative predictor of school-family conflict, but only for male students. This finding suggests that, for male participants who attribute high importance to the school role, the perception of conflict between school and family decreases. A possible explanation for the lack of similar results for female participants can be linked with family gender roles ascribed to women; it may be that despite enrollment in school, female students are more aware of the importance of being able to accommodate school with their familial demands. Some studies report that students accommodate school demands in order to avoid interference with family life and, in situations of perceived incompatibility among roles, nontraditional students typically choose their personal life (i.e., answering to the family demands rather than fulfilling their student role; Adams & Corbett, 2010; Ogren, 2003; Rosário et al., 2014). This may be the case for female students in this study.

Antecedents of School-Family Enrichment

The model provided support for the hypothesis that academic self-efficacy beliefs are related to school-family enrichment for both female and male students. These results are similar to those in a qualitative study by van Rhijn (2014) with undergraduate student parents. The author found that pursuing a lifelong goal added motivation to learn, that student parents wanted to be role models to their children, and that they were motivated by other student parents who had successfully completed school. Therefore, having greater academic self-efficacy can contribute to the experience of enrichment between the school and family roles.

School peers' support was a significant positive predictor of school-family enrichment for only the female subsample. This finding is in line with previous research demonstrating that social support from school peers is beneficial for adjustment to college life for women (Zaleski et al., 1998). The findings suggest that social support is a valuable resource available to reinforce resilience associated with the school role and, therefore, can positively impact school-family enrichment for female nontraditional students. Moreover, the support of school peers was not significantly related to school-family conflict for either female or male students. Previous research has found that school peers' support is related to satisfaction with the academic experience (Van Stone et al., 1994); yet, the social network provided by school peers appears to impact enrichment between the school and family roles only for female students in this study.

Another important finding is that, for both female and male students, school time commitment was not significantly related with either school-family conflict or enrichment. This is a surprising finding because, according to the literature, time management has been pointed out by research as one of the most problematic areas in dealing with multiple roles (Oliveira & Temudo, 2008; van Rhijn, 2014; van Rhijn, 2016). Deeper exploration of the influence of school time commitment on school-family conflict and school-family enrichment is needed to better understand this inconsistent result.

Limitations and Conclusions

Although the present study contributes to furthering the understanding of the experiences of nontraditional Portuguese students, including the importance of school-related antecedents of school-family conflict and school-family enrichment and their differences according to gender, the implications derived from this study should be taken with caution due to some theoretical and methodological limitations. The nature of this study is exploratory. Thus, it is important to have a large sample in future research to enhance the precision of the parameter estimation of the model. Future work evaluating the proposed conceptual model should also include family-related predictors as well as family-school conflict and family-school enrichment in order to develop a more complete understanding of the interactions among school and familial roles and to analyze possible gender differences more extensively. Moreover, since researchers advocate that the student parent population is very diverse (Holmes, 2005; Lero, Smit Quosai, & van Rhijn, 2007; Rosário et al., 2014), future research should include additional variables in the model such as, for

example, social support from family or partners, number and age of children, and study and professional status (part-time versus full-time study). Such inclusions may contribute to building a more comprehensive model that may guide intervention programs in order to support this population to successfully complete higher education. Widening participation in higher education is on the political agenda of many societies, including Portugal, given the potential social and economic benefits in making postsecondary education more accessible to students who have traditionally been excluded (Jones & Lau, 2010; Keane, 2011, Rosário et al., 2014), including working student parents. Higher education institutions are committed to providing lifelong learning to a diversified student population, which includes attracting returning adult learners (Lane, 2012). As stated by Kremer (2016), the academic system often disregards family and work commitments and the consequences of these multiple role engagements that nontraditional students face. In line with research in other cultural environments, in the present study, formal and informal supports and modeling seemed to play an important role in improving students' satisfaction, social integration, and academic success (Clark et al., 2013; Sanchez et al., 2006). In addition, and consistent with van Rhijn and colleagues (2016), higher education institutions can support the creation of formal and informal peer support networks to promote opportunities for nontraditional students to connect with one another through using resources such as mature student networks or Internet portals. This can have an important role in the better integration of nontraditional students in the academic environment.

Increased opportunities for access to higher education should be reflected in increased opportunities for success for all students. In order to guide informed decisions, higher education institutions and counseling centers should create more inclusive practices, recognizing the diversity of students, to deepen our knowledge of current and future postsecondary populations, and to move beyond the normative construction of the university student.

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