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Lockdown practices: a portrait of young people in the family during the first lockdown in Portugal

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ABSTRACT

Governments introduced protective public health measures, including lockdowns and social distancing, in response to the unprecedented global crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. For young people, such measures are particularly painful, as they entail an interruption of their transitions to adulthood, which generally require taking up their position in the public space and emerging as a recognised social peer, either through leaving the parental home, initiating an intimate relationship or getting a full-time job. In Portugal, where such transitions are often postponed, and young people cohabit with parents for much longer, lockdown meant withdrawal from the public space and living in an intensive family collective. This brought many challenges and created tension. Based on the results of a non-representative online survey on the impacts of the pandemic in Portugal, this article focuses how young people aged 16–24 adapted to the 2020 lockdown, using the conceptual lens of familialism. The results show that familialism remains a key support system in adversity, evidencing intergenerational solidarity through everyday practices of resilience and (self-) care, renewing and remaking social bonds. Individual distancing practices are deployed backstage, however, mitigating and nuancing the overwhelming hold of familialism.

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected people's lives since 2020, with damage spreading from health to the economy, from social to individual lives, marking abrupt transitions and accelerating changes that were already taking place at a slower pace (Twigg 2020). While all ages are affected, young people have been identified as most at risk, considering the effects of lockdown on education, job prospects, civil rights and mental health (International Labour Organisation 2020). It is worth noting that the pandemic arose some years after the 2008 financial crisis, which had already jeopardised young people's individualisation trajectories and working experiences, as well as their perceptions of the future (Green 2017).

Following the first cases of COVID-19 in Portugal, on 12 March 2020, the Prime Minister announced a set of measures to be put into immediate effect: these included closing all schools and nightclubs and restricting access to crowded areas such as shopping centres

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and restaurants. On 20 March, a State of Emergency was declared, and further measures restricting freedom of movement were imposed. Citizens were asked to comply with the 'general duty of home confinement', with some exceptions justifying leaving the house. This first lockdown in Portugal lasted from 20 March until 2 May 2020.

These measures led to a refocusing of young people's existence within the domestic space. For many young adults, living in their parents' home now meant to be confined, unable to invest in the world outside and in times of experimentation and emancipation. The young person may have perceived this imprisonment in the family space as a hard step back from her previously conquered freedom (Aeby and Heath 2020). But forced confinement may also have provided the opportunity to update existing affective bonds within the family, to discover new facets in intergenerational relationships and to discover new daily 'family practices' (Phoenix and Brannen 2014).

Starting out from the results of a large survey in Portugal on the impacts of the pandemic (Magalhães et al. 2020), our aim is to provide a glimpse into how young people adjusted their lives within family living arrangements during lockdown, exploring a repertoire of practices which illustrate and develop the concept of 'familialism' in the context of a severe health and social crisis. Our article starts with a discussion of the conceptual tools which inspired our empirical approach. We then move on to a methodological section, where we detail the socio-demographic make-up of our sample and the three questions analysed. Based on young's people's accounts of their daily lives during lockdown, we identified three sets of family practices, unveiling different facets of familialism. Finally, we provide some concluding remarks and signal the limitations of our study.

2. Young people, families and familialism

In youth studies research, family very often appears as an explanatory variable. Material contexts which contribute to heterogeneity in youth are important, and family location in an unequal social space is taken as a marker: middle- and working-class youngsters have different educational paths and chances for success (Bourdieu and Passeron 2005; France, Roberts, and Wood 2018; Green 2017; Pais 2003). Their transitions from school to the labour market are far from being similar (Furlong 1992; Furlong et al. 2017); their opportunities for social mobility vary considerably (Ramos 2015) and family is very often the clue to understanding 'improbable trajectories' (Lahire 1995).

Family is also regarded as a reference in time. Life course perspectives which make it possible to describe young people's trajectories over time and their biographical turning points (Elder, Jonhson, and Crosnoe 2003) take family into account: residential autonomy, i.e. the transition to independent living by leaving the parental home either provisionally or for good, is for many students and young people an important sign of their entry into adulthood (Arundel and Ronald 2016; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Walther 2006).

Family is also a cultural background. Values studies undertaken across Europe have highlighted the primary significance of family in daily life, compared to other life domains such as work, friends, leisure, politics and religion, for all age groups including young people and emerging adults, as evidenced in data collected by EVS 2017 (European Values Study 2020). Portugal is no exception. Family has gone through dramatic changes in recent decades but, as an ideal and as a reality, family still means a great deal for a large majority of the Portuguese, and particularly for young people.

'Familialism', a term associated with corporatist-conservative welfare regimes in the author's seminal typology (Esping-Andersen 1998), is still widely used in contemporary literature to characterise a Southern European family pattern in which informal forms of kinship support are very significant – in a way generously making up for the state's failure to provide social protection. Life transitions, in particular residential independence, arrive later here, because family collective fusional power prevails over individualising emancipatory processes. In Southern European societies, young people move to a home of their own later, and the primary factor in this departure is conjugality, in contrast to the Scandinavian countries, where individual autonomy for youth is not only highly valued but also supported by public policies (Nico 2015). In line with this perspective, diversity in cultural values relating to family roles would explain in large part the difference between welfare regimes in Europe.

The very first version of Esping-Andersen's typology (1990) – distinguishing 'liberal', 'conservative' and 'social democratic' welfare regimes – underwent theoretical and empirical scrutiny (for an overview, Zagel and Lohmann 2021), bringing to light some of its limitations: gender relations were left out, social inequalities were ignored and the internal diversity of the three clusters was not taken into account. We are particularly interested in critiques of the 'conservative regimes', in which Portugal is included. Responding to his critics, Esping-Andersen introduced two subcategories to the conservative regimes: continental European countries differed from southern European ones in terms of levels of familialism – which were higher in the latter.

While sharing some similarities, Southern European countries do not make up a single block. The Portuguese case stands out for moving quickly to very high female activity rates (even higher for mothers of young children), for the importance of the dual earner family model (Tavora 2012) and for its 'one child' offspring pattern (Cunha 2016). On the other hand, Southern familialism is certainly prominent as a cultural environment, and family values are very much present in Portuguese daily routines, a factor which for some reflects Catholic traditions. While this kinship support paradigm might be interpreted as a compensation for a poorer welfare state with limited scope for greater intervention, research shows that despite very strong support received by some nuclear families with children, it is not systematic or as extensive as might be assumed in a 'traditional country'. Moreover, informal support reinforces social inequalities (the lower classes are those who 'receive' the least) (Aboim, Vasconcelos, and Wall 2013; Wall and Gouveia 2014). This unbalance was aggravated by the austerity policies implemented following the 2008 crisis. These brought a dramatic impact on youth employment and on familiar income, namely through salaries and pension cuts, some of which last to this date (Kelly and Pike 2017). In the context of housing, kinship ties and generational interdependency were brought to the forefront in countries where youth individualised trajectories were considered to be strong and consolidated (Green 2017). The pandemic crisis, we believe, accentuated these social processes already in progress, tightening individuals' dependence on family and kinship. In some contexts, 'defamilialisation' processes were challenged, while in others an emergency familialism came into being.

Going beyond and within the abstract category, familialism can be explored in an in-depth perspective (unveiling the family 'black box') and by giving voice to those doing it in the real world.

3. Disasters, crisis and everyday life: social and intimate perspectives

While there is no consensual definition of disaster, most researchers agree that its key aspect is social disruption, on either the individual or the organisational level, which generates a crisis situation (Perry 2018). Disasters and crisis then have many basic characteristics in common: uncertainty, urgency and threat. As much as crises contain social elements (in terms of their causes or consequences), so do disasters. It is now well established that despite the fact that some disasters are caused by inevitable natural events, they are social events, in the sense that they are 'the product of risk, which is in turn rooted in a combination of factors, ranging from human behaviour and vulnerability, for example, to bad policy decisions and environmental degradation' (Wahlstrom 2017, 334).

The COVID-19 pandemic provides a paradigmatic case study for this rationale. As a global disaster that extends in time and space and with no end in sight, it is now possible to observe that its consequences affect people differently according to their circumstances, geographical location and degree of access to health care (Twigg 2020). These differentials make COVID-19 a syndemic, in that 'syndemics are characterised by biological and social interactions between conditions and states, interactions that increase a person's susceptibility to harm or worsen their health outcomes' (Horton 2020, 874).

While crisis situations were once seen as exceptional, today we need to expect the unexpected, be it in the shape of terrorist attacks, financial breakdowns or extreme climate events. The need to co-exist with risk and uncertainty is well encapsulated in Beck's 'risk society' (Beck 1992), acknowledging that risks and their materialisation have led to collective and individual reflexivity, in what can be classified as a suspension of the normal flow of life. Such reflexivity is translated into policy shifts and behavioural changes, often adopted with incomplete information regarding the causes and consequences of such events, with the aim of adapting everyday life to crisis in new ways of being and doing.

In fact, crises frequently provide an opportunity for change, and politicians often exploit disasters to introduce measures that would not be accepted in times of stability (Boin, Paul 't, and Kuipers 2018), including those related to biopolitics and self-disciplining of the body (Foucault 1995). But, as Brown and Galantino (2020) point out, these are the approaches to risk that are focused on the macro level of centralised state power. Meanwhile, in everyday life – considering 'everyday' as a 'largely taken-for-granted world that remains clandestine' (Gardiner 2000, cited in Hall 2019, 770), people carry on with their lives, in the shape of a 'new normal' that resonates with what Schatzki (2016) has called 'adjusting to circumstances within practices'. For Schatzki, 'a social practice is an open spatial-temporal manifold of doings and sayings that is organised by an array of understandings, rules, and teleoaffective structure, where a teleoaffective structure encompasses emotions and end-task-action combinations that are enjoined of or acceptable for participants' (Schatzki 2016, 27). Hence, practices of everyday life are not the product of simple embodiment or cultural scripts; rather, they are consciously negotiated with greater or lesser intensity in the light of people's investments, values and aims. From this, it follows that 'adjustments that people make to circumstances transpire while they are carrying on practices, amid the material arrangements to which those practices are connected' (Schatzki 2016, 27).

Considering the lockdown in its micro consequences – as a crisis that is embedded and translated into practices of everyday life – our aim in this article is to shine a light on how

young people adjust their intimate lives to living under lockdown, revealing their culture and values facing this liminal situation. The family home is our chosen setting.

4. Methodology and sample

Our data was gathered through an online survey undertaken between 25 and 29 March 2020 (Magalhães et al. 2020), during the second week of the first lockdown. The questionnaire was subject to ethics approval of the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon (one of the institutions that coordinated the study) and it required respondents to give their informed consent prior to filling in the form.

Benefiting from the lockdown situation and the enthusiasm shown by many for sharing their experience, the survey reached a considerable number of respondents (11,508, aged between 16 and 65+) but since it relied on snowball sampling, it is not representative of the whole population.

For the purposes of this article, we selected the sub-sample of survey respondents aged between 16 and 24 years (# 1125). The questionnaire was mostly made up of closed questions (social characterisation, health status, studying and/or working under lockdown, housing conditions, sources of information about COVID-19, getting out of the house and its justifications, levels of trust in political/health authorities), but it also included some open-ended questions regarding daily routines, socialising practices and adaptation to lockdown. Here, we specifically focus on three questions:

- Do you want to tell us a little more about the day-to-day life at home/with family/in your street or neighbourhood, describing a typical day? If you think you don't have typical days, you can for example describe yesterday, ...
- Without considering work-related trips, which options best describe your motives for getting out of the house?
- How are you managing to contact your loved ones who are far away right now?

Our sample had an overrepresentation of women (70%), and, in terms of age, 54% of the young people surveyed were between 16 and 21 years old, 46% between 22 and 24 years old. Also, it was a relatively privileged group, possessing economic and cultural resources, as a set of indicators allow us to infer.

In terms of *household income* before the pandemic, half responded that it allowed them to 'live comfortably' (50.1%) and more than a third (38.2%) claimed to be able to 'live reasonably'. Only a small proportion in this sample admitted 'it being difficult' (8.1%) or even 'very difficult' (1.4%) to live on the family income.

Considering their *occupation*, the majority (76.6%) stated they were full-time students. Smaller percentages were employed (15.8%), studying part-time (3.8%) and unemployed (1.6%), and 0.9% were in internships. By the time of the survey, 42% of the sample held a higher *education degree* (at first degree level, at least).

Most of these Portuguese young people (82.3%) stated that they were living with the same people before and after lockdown. At the time of the survey, 81.6% lived with their family; only 5.3% lived in a couple, alone (2.2%) or shared a house with others (8.8%). Those 82% living with parents were in different household types: biparental families (51.3%), single-parent families (15.9%), extended families (11.1%), blended families

(3.2%) and intermittent families (0.2%), with custody shared between father and mother. Household size varied between 3 or 4 (respectively, 31.5% and 32.3%); a total of 2 (17.6%) and 5 (11.9%). Individuals on their own were the other most common situation.

In a period of lockdown, the quality of housing becomes critical. Asked to assess the *quality of their housing*, most respondents (85.1%) considered it 'adequate/satisfactory', far more than those who describe it as merely 'acceptable' (13.0%) or even 'deficient' (1.8%). In sum, this study deals with a relatively privileged young population, and the analysis of the three questions should bear this in mind.

We used a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) to explore the data collected from the above three open-ended survey questions. It is an adequate approach to this research, as our main concern is to know young people's experience of adjusting everyday life to a crisis situation. An inductive approach was conducted, following the common six-step process: familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up.

Exploring aspects of familialism in an emergency situation, we focus on young people's practices during lockdown. Family practices have long been studied and can be defined as everyday practices that are orientated to another family member (Morgan 2011), here understood as coinhabiting. Following the thematic analysis process, we have identified three sets of domestic practices under lockdown: bonding and boundary practices; communication and socialisation; and risk management and protection.

We now move on to the presentation of results.

5. Results

5.1. Bonding practices vs. boundary practices

The sudden confinement of all family members in the same house, full-time, dramatically disrupted young people's daily routines. Bearing in mind that this is a relatively privileged population and that, in Portugal, teleworking is predominant among workers with a higher level of education (Peralta, Carvalho, and Esteves 2022), all activities – studying or teleworking, leisure – were now deployed from home, in a shared space with parents and siblings. Even if our sample covers a segment which most see as being comfortably off in terms of standard of living and housing, the fact is that the home became the only place to be, bringing adults and young people together in unprecedented living arrangements.

The survey had an open-ended question where respondents were asked to describe a typical day at home. Their narratives revealed a largely predominant familialistic pattern, where family fusion was experienced as the natural way of coping with lockdown: family welfare was the product of the engagement of all. This did not exclude explicit strategies for preserving youngsters' individual boundaries within the collective sphere. However, only in a few cases did we find the young person radically distancing himself from the other coinhabitants, deploying boundary practices.

Dominant familialistic patterns were deduced from narratives exclusively focusing on the balanced interplay between the young person and other family members. Each performs their different activities in a fluid, interconnected and well-oiled arrangement. Moments of fusion are practiced and praised: meals, watching the news on TV or

shows on Netflix, walks in the neighbourhood, playing games together are very often cited. The following transcripts illustrate the centripetal importance of the family, to which companion animals are incidentally very close:

We get up at different times, but we always make a point of having meals together (lunch, tea and dinner). At 5 p.m. we walk the dogs, have some tea and then at 9 p.m. we have dinner. At 10 p.m. we call the grandparents to see how they are. We meet to say goodnight to each other at midnight and then go to bed. Margarida, F, 21, student¹

I get up, have some online meetings (video calls), we have lunch, I wash up, the three of us play games, we watch TV, we clean the house thoroughly, have dinner and watch the soaps. Helena F, 23, student

Get up, lunch with the family, play darts with the family, work on my dissertation, dinner, video games, go to bed. Manuel, M, 21, student

Study, do Pilates with the family, play with the cats, gardening. José, M, 20, student

António (M, 18, student) explained how his family organised new working and collaborative routines in the aftermath of the lockdown decree. The use of 'we' signals the importance of the collective whole, to which the youngster felt he belonged:

Because of the current situation, we have all had to come and work at home, and that meant setting up extra workstations and creating new 'rooms' in the house to serve as improvised offices. But everything is running relatively calmly, which seems a little surprising to me for a family of 6 with a pet. Each one of us made a commitment to make as little noise as possible while working, and to try in any way possible not to disturb our neighbour's working day. Even though we all lunch in the same house, we try to stagger the cooking times so that that goes smoothly as well. For everyone's good and so as not to forget good old habits, we continue to eat together at dinner time as we always did, so that in this way we have some time devoted entirely to the family.

Isabel (F, 22, working remotely) described how household duties were planned and performed together and intertwined with leisure activities:

It is totally unusual for all of us to be at home at the same time, so the days have been very untypical. We spend the day cleaning out one room at a time or watching a film, and my father makes a new plan every day to keep himself busy. At the end of the day, I try to do at least 30 minutes of physical exercise indoors or on the veranda.

New experiences also emerged. Food and cooking were an exploratory terrain, as Maria (F, 22, student), enthusiastically described:

We get up early, spend a fair amount of time cooking and trying out new and more elaborate recipes than usual. Each family member has his or her tasks (teleworking and studying) and in the evening we watch films. For leisure activities my sister and I started doing crochet, we also paint and go on FaceTime with friends and family.

Inês (F, 22, student) revealed the family adopted a weekend mode and enjoyed relaxed timetables and their companion animals as never before:

We operate what is almost a weekend timetable, in other words we are a little lax about meal-times, going to bed and getting up, which ends up being rather inevitable because we use the time to be together as a family, play games, watch films, etc. We also have our pets and, well, it's a way of keeping them company for a longer time, and they like it.

For a considerable number of respondents, family practices implied taking advantage of the 'going out' exceptions provided for under the law.² One example is the daily routines such as shopping at the supermarket, putting recyclable waste in the bins, walking the dogs:

my parents and I share the supermarket, each one goes in turn. Filipa, F, 22, student

going out to 'take the waste to recycling centres'. Pedro, M, 23, student

I've been home all day. I go out 3 times a day to walk the dogs. Joaquim, M, 19, student

Young people are thus their parents' partners in the family organisational and relational team. But the familialistic pattern does not erase individual distancing practices. Alongside this 'front stage', they tend to enjoy private moments as well, when they seek isolation 'backstage' (Goffman 1990). Studying alone, working out, hanging around on social networks, watching TV shows are common individual practices, as the case of Sofia (F, 23, student), below shows:

I wake up at 6.50 a.m., have some coffee with my mother, and then we go for a walk of about 4 km (there and back) and we take the dog out. I come back, do some weights, get dressed as if it were a normal day and attend online classes. Then it's lunch, which I make, and after that several hours of studying until dinnertime. After dinner I read or watch a film.

In contrast to these narratives, there are some where the family scenario simply vanishes in the narrative. These self-centred young people described their individual experience in an environment empty of humans. Here, the bedroom, and not the house itself, emerges as the vital space, from which they come out only to have a meal (with or without others). The following transcripts are particularly indicative of these individualistic, boundary practices inside the home – extreme illustrations of a 'bedroom culture' (Livingstone 2007) sometimes reinforced by the presence of non-humans (pets or computers):

Wake up, have a shower, walk the dog – online classes. Later on, lunch, watch films, study, use my spare time (tidying up, doing physical exercise, etc.). Before dinner I walk the dog again and go back home for dinner and entertain myself before going to bed. All this in my room, I just leave it to cook/have a shower but otherwise I stay in my own space all the time, I don't even have any contact with my family. Teresa, F, 19, student

I spend the day on the computer in my room. Luís, M, 24, student

From the narratives, we may deduce that familism is crucial for this group of young people during lockdown: family well-being is made up of an intergenerational fusion and of an organisational setting where the collective prevails over the individual. However, existing distancing or even cutting off practices reveal the preservation of individual spaces and activities within the collective framework.

5.2. Communication practices and socialisation

Since mobility is one of the main resources of twenty-first-century life argues, forced immobility constitutes a heavy burden, difficult to bear in this particularly active and socially intense period of young people's lives.

At a time when the recommendation for everyday life is withdrawal and physical distancing, to minimise the risk of contagion, access to the public spaces where many social

experiences and meetings take place was dramatically reduced, and the move away from direct communication shifted most social interaction to remote communication technologies (Fuchs 2020), mainly operated from home.

Overall, there was a global increase in online communication during lockdown (Gabbadini et al. 2020). As digital natives, young people readily master online environments, and the existence of applications such as WhatsApp, Discord, Zoom, Skype, Teams or Jitsi made it possible to keep up various activities within the home space (work, study, sharing meals and moments with friends ...). Benefiting from adequate technological resources (computers and mobile phones with internet access), the young people surveyed were able to make the most of distance communications. However, spatially and temporally bounded activities taking place in a single space transformed forms of communication and socialisation.

Although confinement reflects a civic duty to maintain physical distance, this distance did not mean social distance, given that communication with peers was maintained:

I use several platforms like Instagram, App like House Party, and WhatsApp and I talk a lot through messages and calls too. Cláudia, F, 23, student

In some cases, lockdown led to greater communication with more distant family members – as well as friends – namely through the creation of extended online chat groups maintained daily. Grandparents, for example, are an important cause for concern and support, unveiling another feature of a predominantly familialistic pattern:

Almost every day I have a video call with my father, I call my grandmother every two days +/- and my family has already had a joint video call (20 people) this week and in principle, we will make a habit of doing it about once a week. Guilherme, M, 21, student

These applications also started to be used for other purposes, such as online teaching and remote working. Even though this was an online survey, several respondents stated that they were unable to take online courses, due to deficient Internet access or equipment. This also confirms that the lockdown highlighted inequalities in digital literacy and material living conditions (Nguyen et al. 2020).

Some young people revealed a segmentation strategy in the choice of platform, depending on the purpose and the interlocutor, since the characteristics and possibilities of each platform end up shaping communication and demand specific skills or equipment in order to function to their full extent (some platforms have simultaneous user limits, others allow videoconferencing):

I take classes three times a week, and then we use Zoom. For workgroup calls, we use Zoom as well. With my family, we talk via phone and video call on the smartphone. Marta, F, 22, student

To talk to friends 'WhatsApp', by video 'Houseparty'. With my girlfriend, 'FaceTime'. With family via Messenger. Rita, F, 21, student

Online platforms are sought after not only to chat, but also for the practice of joint leisure activities, such as watching shows and films on television, playing games and exercising. Games, through platforms such as Discord, Houseparty or even PlayStation, are seen as leisure and as a way of keeping in touch with family and friends. Most young people still use other means, such as the landline or mobile phone, to communicate with older people such as grandparents, who may have difficulty using online platforms due to lack of literacy or access:

Speaking on the cell phone to a grandmother who is home alone. Video chat with boyfriend. Talk via WhatsApp in a group that brings the whole family together. Talk to friends by group video call. Organise physical exercise sessions with friends by group video call. Matilde, F, 23, employed

The urgent need to maintain bonds of sociability and affection in the materiality of bodies impels some of the young people surveyed to overcome the barriers of lockdown to be with girlfriends/boyfriends or 'trusted friends', outside the family home. In fact, non-verbal communication (facial gestures, bodily management and appearance, physical touch) is an important addition to speech in interaction, difficult to experience through virtual platforms.

about once a week, to drive to my boyfriend's house, Cristina, F, 22, student

to meet trusted friends, whose responsibilities imply communication with groups at risk and, therefore, maintain preventive behaviours appropriate to the circumstances. João, M, 23, student

Whether or not they used it as an excuse to escape from being immersed in the family, even for a few minutes, the fact is that most young respondents (73%) indicated that they had at some point left the house to engage in certain activities. Beyond caring activities within the family network, as mentioned above, some youngsters use lockdown exceptions to go out for bodily fitness purposes, an individual resource particularly crucial at this stage of life (Kaur et al. 2020).

Every 3 days, on my own, to go get some air. Olga, F, 16, student

Once in the last 3 weeks, to exercise. Filipe, M, 20, student

Twice to run and once to walk. Ana, F, 22, student

For young people, intense communication during lockdown by means of information technologies was a form of virtual escape, through which they were able to perform various face-to-face activities, even though these were mediated and restricted at an emotional and sensory level. Not only were new applications used, but old ones took on new roles, deepening the appropriation of platforms for everyday purposes (studying, shopping, praying ...), making virtual space a complementary extension to material and physical life. Information technologies such as computers and mobile phones have thus been the main, if not the sole means for young people to access and maintain a private life away from family interference, permitting both distancing and boundary practices to be deployed.

Overall, however, considering familialism as a form of social exchange, the data show that it resonates strongly in Portuguese families' practices. In times of crisis, it may even have been intensified – or reactivated – as a form of collective support and ontological security.

5.3. Practices of risk awareness and care

We identified in our analysis a set of practices related to risk awareness and caring for others as well. In this dimension, home appears as a site with ambivalent and

contradictory meanings, as other studies reflect (Vehkalahti, Armila, and Sivenius 2021). While for most of our respondents, it appears to be a place of comfort, for some being confined with their families resonates conflicts that were present before:

Staying in isolation with family is extremely difficult for those who live in toxic family environments and used places of education or work as an outlet. F, 23, studying

Such example confirms what has been stated in other studies regarding the increased exposure of children and youth to abuse and violence during the COVID lockdown (Cappa and Jijon 2021). In other cases, is the intense conviviality that instills saturation:

... similar schedules among at least 3 of the 5 family members (teleworking or studying for assessments/having classes), some conflicts for the constant use of a space that usually doesn't have so many inhabitants, so often, at the same time. F, 22, studying

On another angle, the sanitary constraints transform families as a negative source of risk, as the proximity and bonding between co-resident or external family members produces a highly fertile terrain for contagion and illness. Responding to this threat, several young people and their families adopted strict sanitary routines at home. Such practices were aimed at not only protecting themselves from contagion, but also avoiding transmission of the virus to their elders, a fear quite evident in the young people's testimonies. Frederico and his family provide a good example:

Me, my sister, my brother, and my mother stay in our respective rooms during the day, each of us leaving to go to the bathroom separately and going to eat individually and always sanitising our hands and the space where we are outside the room. My father goes to work and comes back every night, entering through the lower floor of the house, where he washes, eats and sleeps, to avoid contact with those of us who stay at home. (...) Mail and shopping, basically anything that comes from outside, stays in the garage for a while to 'breathe' or, if it needs to be used straight away, is sanitised before being used'. Frederico, M, 18, student

Other young people chose total isolation as a form of protection:

We hardly ever go out, I haven't left the house for over 15 days (...) I live in a flat and so I have no back yard to get some air. The only person who goes out more often is my father, who only goes to do the shopping. (...) He wears a mask and gloves when he goes out; when he gets home, he puts his clothes and shoes in a bag and keeps them there for five days, washes his hands and puts alcohol and disinfectant on his keys, mobile phone and even his shopping, throws the packaging away and keeps it in bags, and disinfects the rest'. Rui, M, 20, student

The pandemic has highlighted social inequalities in terms of health, since people with higher education and higher incomes tend to have a more effective support network (Correia 2020, 30). In fact, in addition to hygienic practices and physical distancing, other young people took on the role of carers for their own family and neighbours, going shopping, providing medicines, making meals and organising the house. These caring practices are most evident in families with sick parents or in those whose mental health has been affected.

My father is still working, even though he is chronically ill. I spend my days taking classes remotely as I'm in my second year of tertiary education. Whenever I need to go shopping or to the pharmacy, I go instead of my mother, who has respiratory problems. She is terrified. What she sees on the news is not always true, and she has a hard time telling the difference between true and false. Teresa, F, 21, student

Father and grandmother diabetic, with respiratory issues and hypertension. Dealing with morning medication for both, including assisting with insulin administration. Carrying out all household chores (increased, everyone being at home 24/7). Conflicts initiated by father. Distance learning after work and leisure time after dinner. Luísa, F, 20, student

Making meals for my brother and mother, both health professionals, to take to work, I do 30 minutes of physical exercise, and the rest of the day is spent writing my Master's thesis and doing the necessary household chores. Clara, F, 22, student

These accounts sometimes reveal a censorious attitude towards those who do not follow the rules laid down by the authorities and insist on public conviviality:

I go out in the morning, with gloves, to help my parents who work in a grocery store, to deliver essential goods to older people who avoid leaving the house. Unfortunately, I still see some groups of people in the street who insist on ignoring the dangers announced. I make lunch for my parents while they are still at work. I clean and disinfect the most used spaces at home. Antónia, F, 24, employed

I did some exercises at home. At the end of the day, I took a shower and went shopping for our elderly neighbours. My mother came home from work at 6 pm. we had an early dinner. I noticed that when I went jogging I didn't see any young people, only people over 60 or parents who take advantage of not working to ride a bike or walk with their young children. Nuno, M, 23, student

These data, thus, confirm other studies in which it was found that young people closely followed the distancing rules during the first lockdown, because as they saw the virus as being serious for society in general and for their own in particular (Franzen and Wöhner 2021). In this sense, young people saw the culture of familialism and proximity, evident in cohabitation and strong socialisation, as a risk factor. They were afraid transmitting the disease. On the other hand, this same perception of risk led many young people to take on the role of caregivers, performing tasks inside and outside the home that contributed to the social well-being of the most vulnerable.

6. Final remarks

We have provided a portrait of young people's practices at home during the first lockdown in Portugal due to the COVID-19 pandemic, using a combination of the theoretical tools of familialism and crisis. A severe health and social crisis served as a pretext to revisit some arguments relating to the prevalence of familialism in conservative Southern European welfare regimes, pointing out from the start some indicators that place Portugal outside the general framework of the cluster in which it is included. Crisis provided a unique terrain for exploring ways in which taken-for-granted categories are challenged by extreme social ruptures, unveiling new facets and complexities latent – but discrete – in normal times.

During lockdown, young people had to refocus their existence within the domestic space, which meant being confined to their parents' home, out of school, with minimum levels of physical mobility. An emergency familialism came into being: parallel to the National Health Service (focused on COVID-19 treatment), families were required to reinforce their roles as providers of well-being, encompassing all the other domains of individual existence.

Our analysis focused on three sets of practices: bonding and bounding practices; communication and socialisation practices; and practices of risk awareness and care.

Dominant familialistic patterns were deduced from narratives exclusively focusing on the balanced interplay between young people and other family members. Young people are their parents' partners in the well-oiled organisational and relational family team, which for many expands outside the domestic sphere to embrace grandparents. This includes practices related to risk awareness and caring for others. Here, familialism appears not just as a benefit for family members' well-being but as a source of risk: proximity and bonding might bring contagion and illness. Young people closely followed the distancing rules during the first lockdown, as they perceived the virus to be a serious social and individual threat. On the other hand, they took on the role of caregivers, performing tasks inside and outside the home that increased the social well-being of the most vulnerable.

The familialistic pattern does not, however, eliminate individual efforts to define personal boundaries and distancing practices. In addition to life on the 'front stage', they enjoy private moments as well, when they seek isolation 'backstage', where they can continue to explore aspects of individual autonomy and construct their biographical singularity. Counterbalancing physical immobility, intense communication practices during lockdown by means of ICTs were a form of virtual escape for this generation of digital natives. New applications were used, and old ones took on new roles, both being a means for young people to access and maintain a private life away from family interference. Radical boundary practices from the family at home were also found but are quite residual; the young person takes refuge in the bedroom and lives a life of his own, isolated from other family members.

There are some limitations to our study. The biased social composition of our sample, where privileged families were overrepresented, does not permit generalisations. Also, as these young people were captured in a particular moment in a post-lockdown situation, no data was collected on the pre-lockdown family, impeding comparison in time. On the other hand, the bias of the sample – a largely educated sample with the reflective capacity and willingness to narrate its life – allowed us to reveal the potential and methodological richness of the qualitative approach to a survey, based on open questions.

Despite these limitations, these data illuminate existing family conditions and open up further lines of research. First, we wonder if the overwhelming prevalence of familialistic practices we observed is a temporary phenomenon, resulting from a recently imposed lockdown, it being predictable that distancing practices take over as time goes by; or if they will be reinforced as lockdown measures endure and economic and social hardships deepen. Furthermore, if an increasingly common state of crisis turns the emergency familialism into the rule and not the exception, impacting 'de-familialisation' processes. Secondly, our sample portrays a rather well-off group, where family material, cultural and social resources support an emergency familialism, encouraging intergenerational dependence and providing survival, care and support for all. However, the vast majority of the population lack these resources, and it is fair to assume that social inequalities were aggravated during lockdown. Emergency familialism is thus a privilege for some, not a pattern available for all. More research is needed on the everyday lives of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in COVID-19 pandemics, examining to what extent they may or may not reflect the same familialistic pattern.

Notes

1. Each interviewee is presented with a fictitious name, and by sex (F, M, /N/A), age and activity (student/employed).
2. In Portugal's lockdown, some activities involving leaving the house for short periods were allowed: going to work, volunteering, buying essential goods and services, assisting vulnerable people and accompanying minors to obtain health care; in addition, short walks for the purpose of enjoying the open air, physical activity and walking companion animals were permitted.

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