

FAMILY FUNCTIONING AND ROLES CHILDREN ASSUME IN FAMILIES

Miljana Spasić Šnele*, Jelisaveta Todorović, Ivana Janković

University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Niš, Serbia

ORCID iDs: Miljana Spasić Šnele
Jelisaveta Todorović
Ivana Janković

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5492-3386>
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9007-6935>
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3932-4489>

Abstract

The aim of the research was to examine the relationship between the dimensions of family functioning and the roles children can assume within the family system (hero, scapegoat, mascot, and lost child). The participants were students ($N = 147$) ages 18 through 25 ($M = 20.09$, $SD = 1.64$). To obtain the data, the FACES IV and the Children's Roles Inventory (CRI) were used. The results indicated that the scores on the chaotic scale significantly predicted the roles hero ($\beta = -.236$, $p = .015$; $R^2 = .11$, $F(2, 146) = 6.065$, $p = .003$) and scapegoat ($\beta = .204$, $p = .015$; $R^2 = .086$, $F(2, 146) = 6.844$, $p = .001$). A newly created variable, the indicator of family functioning ($\beta = .289$, $p = .000$), and the enmeshment scale were significant predictors of the mascot role ($\beta = .165$, $p = .036$; $R^2 = .12$, $F(2, 146) = 10.08$, $p = .000$). Regarding the lost child role, the indicator of family functioning ($\beta = -.242$, $p = .018$) and the rigidity scale stood out as a significant predictors ($\beta = .186$, $p = .014$; $R^2 = .200$, $F(4, 144) = 8.98$, $p = .000$). The results were interpreted in the light of previous theoretical and empirical findings.

Key words: children's roles, family functioning, circumplex model, late adolescence.

ФУНКЦИОНАЛНОСТ ПОРОДИЧНИХ ОДНОСА И УЛОГЕ КОЈЕ ДЕЦА МОГУ ПРЕУЗИМАТИ У ПОРОДИЦАМА

Апстракт

Циљ овог рада био је испитати однос димензија породичне функционалности и улога које деца могу преузети у породици (хероја, жртвеног јагњета, маскоте и изгубљеног детета). У истраживању је учествовало 147 испитаника старости од 18 до 25 година ($AC = 20.09$, $SD = 1.64$). У поступку прикупљања података коришћени су инструменти: FACES IV и Инвентар улога деце. Резултати су показали да је димензија хаотичности значајан предиктор улоге хероја ($\beta = -.236$, $p = .015$; $R^2 = .11$, $F(2, 146) = 6.06$, $p = .003$) и улоге жртвеног јагњета ($\beta = .204$, $p =$

* Corresponding author: Miljana Spasić Šnele, University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Ćirila i Metodija 2, 18101 Niš, Serbia, miljana.spasic.snele@filfak.ni.ac.rs

.015; $R^2 = .086$, $F(2, 146) = 6.844$, $p = .001$). Новокреирана варијабла – индикатор породичне функционалности ($\beta = .289$, $p = .000$) и димензија заплетености представљају значајне предикторе улоге маскоте ($\beta = .165$, $p = .036$; $R^2 = .12$, $F(2, 146) = 10.08$, $p = .000$). У односу на улогу изгубљено дете као значајни предиктори издвојили су се индикатор породичне функционалности ($\beta = -.242$, $p = .018$) и димензија ригидности ($\beta = .186$, $p = .014$; $R^2 = .200$, $F(4, 144) = 8.98$, $p = .000$). Добијени резултати сагледани су у светлу досадашњих теоријских и емпиријских сазнања.

Кључне речи: улоге деце, породично функционисање, циркумплекс модел, период касне адолесценције.

INTRODUCTION

As a system, the family implies interpersonal communication, which involves the reciprocal exchange of information and emotions among members. The functioning of a family system hinges on its capacity to meet its members' needs, facilitate effective communication, foster trust, collaboratively problem-solve, and navigate both emotional and practical challenges together (Čudina, Obradović & Obradović, 2006; Olson & Gorall, 2006). In contrast, dysfunctional families struggle to adapt to challenges, stresses, and crises. Characterised by chaos, these families often exhibit reversal of roles between parents and children, with one member designated as the 'identified patient' to deflect underlying family issues (Deutsch, 1967). One of the best-known and most frequently used models in reaserch of family functioning is the Circumplex model of Marital and Family Systems (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1989). It is a prominent framework examining family functioning through the lenses of family cohesion, flexibility, and communication dimensions.

According to Olson (2000), the family cohesion dimension refers to the emotional connection between family members, and how they balance togetherness and separation. There are three balanced and two unbalanced levels. The underlying assumption is that three levels of family cohesion dimension – somewhat related, related, and highly related – make a balanced cohesion that is necessary for optimal family functioning. Extreme values, whether low - disengagement, or high – enmeshment, represent problematic levels for family functioning over a long period of time. Disengagement represents extreme emotional exlusion, with little mutual interaction among family members, and great personal independence and detachment. On the other hand, enmeshed family functioning represents extreme closeness and loyalty, and family members are highly dependent on each other.

Flexibility refers to “the quality and expression of leadership and organization, relationships between roles and negotiation” (Olson & Gorall, 2006, p. 3). More precisely, flexibility regards how a family balances stability and change. Balanced flexibility implies the existence of a stable structure and certain rituals, while there is also the possibility for change –

adaptability, which implies adaptation to changed circumstances and developmental tasks within family life cycles. Unbalanced family systems tend to be either rigid or chaotic. A rigid family functioning is characterised by difficulty in making the changes required by situational or developmental changes, and chaotic functioning is an indicator of problems with organisation and leadership (Olson & Gorall, 2006).

Communication represents the third dimension of this model and is defined as a set of communication skills that are useful for the family system (Olson, Gorall & Tiesel, 2007). It is evaluated through listening and speaking skills, clarity, concentration on the topic, and openness, as well as through appreciation and respect. The functioning of the family system largely depends on family communication. Namely, communication ensures the transfer of information, the harmonisation of the behavior of family members, the resolution of problems and conflicts, as well as the expression of different feelings.

The main hypothesis of the Circumplex model is that balanced levels of cohesion and flexibility are most suitable for healthy family functioning, and unbalanced levels of cohesion and flexibility are associated with problematic family functioning (Olson & Gorall, 2006).

Living within a family system, children learn to follow the implicit and explicit family rules, which can lead to adopting certain forms of behavior that could be structured in roles (Beesley & Stoltenberg, 2002; Harter, 2000, as cited in Draper, 2008). Roles emerge and are built when children receive feedback on the extent to which their behavior has met the expectations and needs of the family (Veronie & Fruestorfer, 2001). The expectations of significant others may be age-appropriate but are sometimes incongruent with the child's developmental characteristics and abilities. Satir (1967, as cited in Samuel, Mahmood, & Saleem, 2014) indicates that some parents are oblivious to their children's developmental needs, unrealistically expecting them to behave in a manner that is not in harmony with their age. Sometimes roles reverse between a parental figure and their children (Potter & Williams, 1991). For example, some children of alcoholics take over some roles to protect themselves from the deleterious behaviors of their parents, to restore the balance in the family (Samuel et al., 2014), to facilitate the adaptive functioning of the family to cope with external (social) demands, but also to manage the additional stressors caused by alcoholism (Veronie & Fruestorfer, 2001). Such roles, which are inconsistent with developmental norms, may benefit children in the short term but can lead to long-term distress and dysfunction (Samuel et al., 2014). Expectations regarding the designated role shape relations with other family members, which perpetuates certain patterns of behaviors, and are ultimately transferred to the way a child functions outside of the family sphere (Ryś, 2011). They also influence the type of experiences and activities that

a child seeks out, and thus define the personality of the individual and his or her development (Cierpialkowska, 1992, as cited in Ryś, 2011).

Black (1982) and Wegscheider (1981, as cited in Potter & Williams, 1991) gave a theoretical presentation of the roles that children could assume in families where one (or both) of the parents has a problem with alcoholism. Later Potter and Williams (1991) created an instrument that empirically confirmed roles: *hero*, *scapegoat*, *lost child*, and *mascot*. According to the authors, these roles exist not only in families with the presence of parental alcoholism but in every family, providing a basis for their further study and understanding in different family systems.

The *hero* role is characterised by attracting positive attention to oneself through achievement-oriented behavior (Williams & Potter, 1994). Trying to achieve a certain level of control and stability within the system, but also to divert attention from family problems, the child who takes on the role of hero may seem competent and serious to others (Veronie & Fruestorfer, 2001; Williams & Potter, 1994). The family *hero* tries to prove to the world that his family is all right (Ryś, 2011). At school, this child stands out either in good marks or in sports, and gives the impression of an independent person not needing any help; therefore, he or she often does not receive adequate support from adults. The family *hero* often undertakes important personal sacrifices and takes on many responsibilities to ease the responsibilities of others for their own good. Individuals acting as a *hero* often become perfectionists, workaholics and control others, and choose professions where they can help others. As they are used to performing a responsible role, they often have a successful career of their choice.

Children who take on the role of *scapegoat* may seek attention through negative, confrontational, or defiant behaviors, e.g. truancy, theft, drinking alcohol, and seeking the company of people from the margins of society (Ryś, 2011; Veronie & Fruestorfer, 2001; Williams & Potter, 1994). As a problematic child, it is often blamed for the negative atmosphere in the house (Veronie & Fruestorfer, 2001), unifying the family through their own 'ineptness' (Ryś, 2011). A child who assumes this role usually shows a preference for extra-family activities, and is more influenced by peer group values and often engages in antisocial or destructive behaviors (Ryś, 2011; Veronie & Fruehstorfer, 2001). Typically, they soon find themselves in conflict with the law and they often become addicted to alcohol or drugs (Ryś, 2011). People who performed the role of *scapegoat* experience permanent failures due to their self-destructive tendencies. Often, they also encounter disapproval, because they behave in a manner that is difficult to accept. *Scapegoats* somehow remain in their former role – they evoke and provoke conflicts, become social outcasts suffering from loneliness and isolation from others.

The *mascot* role is characterised by relying on humor when dealing with disturbing and unpleasant thoughts, feelings or situations (Veronie &

Fruehstorfer, 2001; Scharff, Broida, Conway, & Yue, 2003). A child in this role may become aware of the influence he has on others and may develop the belief that survival depends on giving others what they want or expect. The family *mascot* is a child who can discharge family tensions. This child diffuses tensions by being in the spotlight and focusing the attention of all household members, indicating its greater involvement in the family system. With time, the child may lose a clear sense of the border between jokes and serious situations, laughter and tears. A disconnection from feelings of sorrow and suffering occurs, and the mechanism of 'putting on a game face' is all the child has left. Later in life, in order not to get hurt, those performing this role try to be liked in their environment and they try to get the approval of the environment through submissive attitudes. Usually, they cope poorly with stressful situations and situations that require taking responsible decisions (Ryś, 2011). Individuals who adopt the role of the *mascot* are often perceived as cheerful people who amuse others. However, deep inside, they may suffer from sadness, anxiety and uncertainty. Although they seem to be happy and bring joy to others, some of them may feel frustrated and lonely.

The role of the *lost child* is usually characterised by the child's withdrawal from other family members and insufficiently developed social skills, which is compensated by the development of a rich world of imagination and escape into fantasy, and in essence becoming 'invisible' (Veronie & Fruehstorfer, 2001; Scharff et al., 2003). Children that assume the role of the *lost child* hide their feelings very deeply, so that it is difficult to reach them. Sometimes they turn their anger against themselves. The price they pay for withdrawal includes the atrophy of contact and coexistence skills with other human beings, the impulse to flee from difficult situations, and the willingness to negate existing problems. They have few friends and are mostly outsiders (Robinson & Rhoden, 2003, as cited in Ryś, 2011). As they are timid and often feel lonely, they cannot open up to others, being often unable to cope with problems. *Lost children* might remain 'lost people,' not adapted to living with others, or to professional and social life. The tendency to isolate themselves from the world, which they learned in childhood, makes them reclusive adults who prefer their own company (Ryś, 2011).

Fischer and Wapler (1994) placed these four roles in two categories termed as positive and negative. The *hero* and the *mascot* were placed in the 'positive' category, while the *scapegoat* and the *lost child* were placed in the 'negative' category. These two categories were determined by the extent to which these roles helped or hindered the normal functioning of the family.

To the authors' knowledge, the relationship between family functioning and the roles children assume within the family has not been examined. Understanding the interplay between family functioning and chil-

dren's roles may provide valuable insights which can inform interventions aimed at promoting healthy family relationships and children's well-being. Therefore, the aim of this research was to explore the predictive value of the dimensions of family functioning on the roles participants assume in their families.

METHOD

Sample

The research sample consists of participants in the period of late adolescence, mostly students of psychology, and social work and social policy of Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, ages 18 through 25 ($M = 20.09$, $SD = 1.64$). Regarding parental marital status, 115 respondents indicated that their parents were married, 23 reported that their parents were divorced, and 6 selected 'other' without providing further details.

Instruments

The **Children's Roles Inventory** (CRI, Potter & Williams, 1991) is intended primarily to determine the roles that children may assume when growing up in alcoholic families. However, according to Potter and Williams (1991), these roles exist in all families, regardless of the presence or absence of parental alcoholism. The CRI includes 60 items that are divided into four subscales – *hero* (item example: 'When I was a child, I was an achiever.'), *scapegoat* (item example: 'When I was a child, I was aggressive.'), *lost child* (item example: 'When I was a child, I was depressed.') and the *mascot* (item example: 'When I was a child, I was the center of attention.'). Respondents are expected to indicate the number that best describes how they were or how they acted during high school years on a five-point Likert scale. The reliability of all dimensions in our sample is adequate: the *hero role* ($\alpha = .86$), the *scapegoat* ($\alpha = .86$), the *mascot* ($\alpha = .74$), and the *lost child* ($\alpha = .87$).

The Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale, IV Revision (FACES IV; Olson, 2000) is a questionnaire designed to measure the key concepts or main dimensions of the Circumplex Model of family functioning. It contains 62 items, and includes eight scales. Two balanced scales measure balanced family cohesion and balanced family flexibility, and four unbalanced scales measure extremely high and extremely low cohesion – disengagement and enmeshment, and flexibility – rigidity and chaos (Olson et al., 2007). Beside that, one scale measures family communication, and one assesses family satisfaction. When it comes to the reliability of the instrument in our research, the following results were obtained: cohesion ($\alpha = .87$), flexibility ($\alpha = .68$, excluding the question: 'We transfer responsibilities for the household from one to another,' increased $\alpha = .76$), communication ($\alpha = .91$), satisfaction with family ($\alpha = .93$), disengagement ($\alpha = .68$, excluding the question: 'Family members are independent when

it comes to solving a problem.’ increased $\alpha = .70$), enmeshment ($\alpha = .59$, excluding the question: ‘Family members have little need for friends outside the family.’ increased to $\alpha = .63$), rigidity ($\alpha = .62$, excluding the question: ‘Our family is highly organised.’ increased $\alpha = .68$), and chaos ($\alpha = .71$).

RESULTS

The results of descriptive analysis are presented first, along with the further results of correlation and regression analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the examined variables

	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Sk</i>	<i>Ku</i>
Hero	149	2.47	5.00	3.83	0.59	-.22	-.722
Scapgoat	149	1.00	3.80	1.92	0.60	.65	-.063
Mascot	149	2.20	4.67	3.61	0.51	-.40	-.056
Lost child	149	1.00	4.73	2.54	0.74	.424	-.118
Cohesion	149	1.00	5.00	3.88	0.84	-.822	.166
Flexibility	149	1.00	5.00	3.45	0.81	-.738	.397
Disengagement	149	1.00	5.00	2.52	0.76	.609	.411
Enmeshment	149	1.00	4.33	2.28	0.69	.261	.007
Rigidity	149	1.00	4.17	2.30	0.71	.555	.023
Chaotic	149	1.00	5.00	2.42	0.77	.643	.655
Communication	149	1.40	5.00	3.67	0.89	-.618	-.208
Family satisfaction	149	1.11	5.00	3.54	0.94	-.378	-.551

Note. sk - skewness, ku – kurtosis.

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that the skewness and kurtosis values indicate that the data was normally distributed. Therefore, parametric statistical techniques were employed for further analysis.

Table 2. Correlation between variables

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Hero	-.37**	.15	.03	.14	.19*	-.03	-.04	.09	-.27**	.17*	.17*
2. Scapgoat	/	.07	.08	-.04	.00	.11	.21**	.08	.25**	-.05	-.07
3. Mascot		/	-.59**	.26**	.29**	-.03	.19*	-.03	-.08	.28**	.29**
4. Lost child			/	-.33**	-.32**	.29**	.09	.20*	.31**	-.34**	-.37**
5. Cohesion				/	.79**	-.65**	.11	-.03	-.43**	.81**	.83**
6. Flexibility					/	-.49**	.11	.07	-.43**	.73**	.78**
7. Disengagement						/	-.03	-.02	.44**	-.59**	-.59**
8. Enmeshment							/	.39**	.31**	.09	.08
9. Rigidity								/	.02	-.10	-.07
10. Chaotic									/	-.43**	-.48**
11. Communication										/	.86**
12. Family satisfaction											/

Note. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Based on Table 2, it can be seen that the role of the hero was in weak positive correlation with flexibility, communication and family satisfaction, and in negative correlation with chaotic family functioning. The role of the scapegoat was in a weak and positive correlation with enmeshed and chaotic family functioning. The role of the mascot was in a weak positive correlation with the family cohesion and flexibility dimensions, and the enmeshment, communication, and family satisfaction scales. The role of the lost child was in a moderate negative correlation with the family cohesion and flexibility dimensions, and the communication and family satisfaction scales, and in a weak positive correlation with the disengagement, rigidity and chaotic scale.

Table 2 shows that the family cohesion and flexibility dimensions, and the communication and family satisfaction scales were highly intercorrelated. Relying on the recommendation given in the available literature (Milas, 2009; Pallant, 2009), a new variable was created from highly correlated variables. Given that all variables content-wise indicate the functioning of the family system, it was decided that the name of the new variable should be 'indicator of a functional family system.' The new variable was created by calculating the mean of items related to the family cohesion and flexibility dimensions, and the communication and family satisfaction scales.

In further analysis, only those dimensions of family functioning that were statistically significantly correlated with the criterion will be included as predictors in the regression models.

Tabela 3. Dimensions of family functionality as predictors of the hero

Predictors	β	p	R^2	$F (df)$	p	Tolerance	VIF
Indicator of a functional family system	.07	.441	.114	6.065	.003	0.76	1.31
Chaotic	-.236	.015		(2, 146)		0.76	1.31

Based on Table 3, we can see that the model explains 11.4% of the *hero* role, and that the chaotic scale stood out as a significant predictor of negative direction.

Tabela 4. Dimensions of family functionality as predictors of the scapegoat

Predictors	β	p	R^2	F	p	Tolerance	VIF
Enmeshment	.155	.066	.086	6.844	.001	0.90	1.11
Chaotic	.204	.015		(2, 146)		0.90	1.11

Based on Table 4, we can see that the model explains 8.6% of the criterion variable of the *scapegoat* role, whereby only the chaotic scale, as the dimension of family functioning, proved to be a significant predictor, in a positive direction.

Tabela 5. Dimensions of family functionality as predictors of the mascot

Predictors	β	p	R^2	F	p	Tolerance	VIF
Indicator of a functional family system	.289	.000	.12	10.08 (2, 146)	.000	0.988	1.013
Enmeshment	.165	.036				0.988	1.013

From Table 5, we can see that the model explains 12% of the criterion variable of *mascot*, and that indicators of a functional family system and the enmeshment scale stood out as predictors of the positive direction.

Tabela 6. Dimensions of family functionality as predictors of the lost child

Predictors	β	p	R^2	F	p	Tolerance	VIF
Indicator of a functional family system	-.242	.018	.200	8.98 (4, 144)	.000	0.540	1.853
Disengagement	.071	.471				0.569	1.758
Rigidity	.186	.014				0.991	1.009
Chaos	.161	.067				0.734	1.363

When it comes to the role of *lost child*, the results of regression analysis indicated that the model explains 20% of the criterion, and indicators of a functional family system (in a negative direction) and rigidity scale (in a positive direction) were significant predictors.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to explore the predictive value of the dimensions of family functioning on the roles participants assume in their families. Our findings indicate that family scores on the chaotic scale significantly predicted the *hero* and *scapegoat* roles. However, this contribution is different in the sense that a lower score on the chaotic scale is associated with the role of the *hero*, and a higher score with the role of the *scapegoat*. Chaotic family functioning represents a stressful environment that impacts an individual's ability to self-regulate affect and behaviors (Deater-Deckard et al., 2012; Evans et al., 2005). In families with chaotic functioning, adolescents may feel helpless and incompetent, and their physical and behavioral health may be compromised (Tucker, Sharp, Van Gundy, & Rebellon, 2018). Adolescents from families with chaotic family functioning reported more frequent suicide-related thoughts (Paluszny, Davenport, & Kim, 1991), and are more likely to manifest conduct disorder (Kazdin, 1993). Tucker et al. (2018) conducted a longitudinal study and concluded that adolescents' perceptions of chaotic family functioning were directly linked to worse physical health and problematic substance use. Considering the previously stated, as well as the characteristics of the *scapegoat* role, we could say that similar findings were obtained in our

research. Children who take on the scapegoat role often seek attention through negative, oppositional, or rebellious behaviors (Veronie & Fruestorfer, 2001; Williams & Potter, 1994), and are more influenced by peer values, which may lead them to engage in antisocial or harmful behaviors (Veronie & Fruestorfer, 2001).

On the other hand, a stable and predictable family environment that provides a sense of security represents the background for the development of characteristics related to the role of a *hero*. Balanced flexibility implies the existence of a stable structure and certain rituals, while there is also the possibility of change to certain life circumstances and needs of family members (Olson & Gorall, 2006). The *hero* is, along with the role of *mascot*, placed in the 'positive' category (Fischer & Wapler, 1994), and refers to a child that is achievement-oriented (Williams & Potter, 1994). This child stands out at school through good grades or sports, often making personal sacrifices and taking on responsibilities to help others. Individuals with a 'hero' mindset tend to become perfectionists, workaholics, and control others, often choosing professions where they can assist others. Our findings suggest that a stable and predictable environment fosters the development of these positive characteristics, in contrast to chaotic family functioning.

Indicators of a functional family system and the enmeshment scale (both in a positive direction) play an important role in the adoption of the characteristics of the *mascot*. The *mascot* is characterised by relying on humor when dealing with stress (Veronie & Fruehstorfer, 2001; Scharff et al., 2003). The ability to approach problems through humor has been seen by many psychologists as an adaptive skill for dealing with stress (Booth-Butterfield et al., 2007; Petrović, 2009). The obtained results showed that indicators of a functioning family system contribute to the development of the aforementioned characteristics of the *mascot* role. Family systems characterised by equilibrium between closeness and privacy, consequent rules, roles, and behavioral patterns that can be changed when necessary are seen by family members as a network of support (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991) and represent a significant source of adolescent well-being (McFarlane, Bellissimo, & Norman, 1995; Rask, Åstedt-Kurki, Paavilainen, & Laippala, 2003). Accordingly, we can conclude that balanced levels of cohesion and flexibility, effective communication, and high family satisfaction contribute to an individual assuming the role of a *mascot*.

Still, the results also indicated that the enmeshment scale plays an important role in predicting the *mascot* role. In enmeshed families, members are overinvolved and there is little privacy (Lang, 2018). There is extreme closeness and high levels of dependence between family members (Olson, 2003). How to understand the relationship of the enmeshment scale and the role of the *mascot*? As stated earlier in the paper, children in the *mascot* role may believe that the success of relationships depends on ful-

filling others' expectations (Veronie & Fruehstorfer, 2001; Scharff et al., 2003). They often relieve family tension by seeking attention and being the center of focus, which can lead to them becoming deeply enmeshed in the family system. This overinvolvement can hinder the child's ability to separate from the family and develop a distinct identity. As Campbell, Adams, and Dobson (1984) noted, adolescents from enmeshed families are at risk of an identity foreclosure.

A low level of family system functionality – characterised by lower scores in the family cohesion and flexibility dimensions, as well communication, and satisfaction, along with high scores on rigidity scale – was a significant predictor of characteristics related to the role of the *lost child*. Adolescence is a period when families should balance family stability and flexibility to meet the aspirations of adolescents for changing rules and the exercise of freedom and independence from parents (Matejević, 2010). In rigid families there are no negotiations, most decisions are made by the leader, roles are divided, and the rules do not change (Spasić Šnele, Todorović & Komlenić, 2020). Therefore, rigid families are neither prepared nor capable of adapting to the evolving needs of adolescents (Matejevic, Jovanovic, & Lazarevic, 2014). In such a family system, there are no opportunities for the healthy development of adolescents, especially if we consider the existence of strictly defined rules. In previous studies, it has been shown that family rigidity relates to inadequate problem-solving skills, suicidal ideation, loneliness, and low levels of a sense of coherence in adolescents (Carris, Sheeber, & Howe, 1998; Sharabi, Levi, & Margalit, 2012). We can add to the previous findings with new ones, indicating that the rigidity of the family system can contribute to the development of characteristics related to the role of the *lost child*. Children in the *lost child* role, characterised by withdrawal and underdeveloped social skills, often create rich fantasy worlds as an escape (Veronie & Fruehstorfer, 2001; Scharff et al., 2003). They struggle to define their role within the family and seek solitude to shield themselves from familial turmoil.

The findings underscore the importance of viewing the family as a system characterised by ongoing, reciprocal interactions among its members. Specifically, this research shows that family functioning can also be reflected in the roles that children can assume to maintain the homeostasis of the family system. By assuming the role of *mascot*, *hero*, *scapegoat* or *lost child*, children strive to make the family system more functional. However, not all family roles are beneficial for the individuals who assume them. Roles like *mascot* and *hero* are often seen as positive, whereas roles such as *scapegoat* and *lost child* are typically viewed as negative from social and global family lenses. Therefore, what may be optimal for the family is not necessarily advantageous for the child, and this distinction should be acknowledged. Based on the knowledge that lower family system functioning and increased rigidity predicted the *lost child* role, while higher

scores on the chaotic scale predicted the *scapegoat* role, tailored family counseling interventions can be developed. Given that chaotic and rigid family functioning signify extreme ends of the flexibility spectrum, families exhibiting these characteristics would benefit from support in establishing a moderate level of family flexibility.

In addition to the highlighted merits, this research also has certain limitations. Namely, the sample consisted of respondents who are in the period of late adolescence, and we cannot claim whether they still live with other members of their family or not, which can certainly be reflected in their roles in the families of origin. The sample size is somewhat limited, consisting only of psychology, social work, and social policy students, which limits the generalisability of the results. The research is transversal; therefore, it is not possible to provide causal conclusions. In addition, this research shows that the dimensions of family functioning according to the Circumplex model explain a small percentage of the variance of the criterion variables (ranging from 9.1 to 20%), indicating that other factors, e.g., psychological characteristic of the child, such as self-esteem (Potter & Williams, 1991), could have an important role in predicting these family roles.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrated that understanding children's roles within families requires considering the characteristics of family functioning. Utilising the Circumplex model in this research, we found specific associations between family cohesion and flexibility dimensions and the roles of *mascot*, *hero*, *scapegoat*, and *lost child*. Consequently, roles deemed positive – the *hero* and the *mascot* – were predicted by the chaotic scale (in the negative direction), and by family functionality and the enmeshment scales (in the positive direction), respectively. Conversely, negative roles, such as the *scapegoat* and the *lost child*, were predicted by scores on the chaotic scale, and by scores of family functionality (in negative direction) and the rigidity scales (in positive direction), respectively. This research indicates that the functioning of a family can be reflected in the roles children adopt to preserve the balance of the family system. By assuming roles like the *mascot*, *hero*, *scapegoat*, or *lost child*, children tend to enhance the functioning of the family. Still, what is socially favoured and beneficial for the family may not always be in the best interest of the child, since not all family roles are beneficial for the individuals who assume them. The results highlighted the importance of counselling, especially for families characterised by chaotic and rigid functioning, which can lead to children assuming negative roles such as the *scapegoat* and *lost child*.

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ФУНКЦИОНАЛНОСТ ПОРОДИЧНИХ ОДНОСА И УЛОГЕ КОЈЕ ДЕЦА МОГУ ПРЕУЗИМАТИ У ПОРОДИЦАМА

Миљана Спасић Шнеле, Јелисавета Тодоровић, Ивана Јанковић
Универзитет у Нишу, Филозофски факултет, Ниш, Србија

Резиме

Функционалност породичног система зависи од њеног капацитета да одговори на потребе чланова породице, олакша ефикасну комуникацију између њих, негује поверење, омогући заједничко решавање проблема и управља емоционалним и практичним изазовима. У циљу процене функционалности породице, у овом истраживању пошли смо од Циркумплекс модела породичног и брачног функционисања као једног од најпознатијих и најчешће коришћених модела у истраживањима који испитује породичну динамику помоћу димензија кохезије, флексибилности и комуникације (Olson, Russel, & Sprenkle, 1989). Живећи у породици, деца уче да прате имплицитна и експлицитна правила, што може водити усвајању одређених облика понашања која се могу структурирати у улоге. Блек (Black, 1982) и Вегчајдер (Wegscheider, 1981, према Potter & Williams, 1991) указали су на улоге које би деца могла да преузму у породицама у којима један (или оба) родитеља имају проблем са алкохолизмом. Деце нију касније, Потер и Вилијамс креирали су инструмент који је емпиријски потврдио улоге хероја, жртвеног јагњета, изгубљеног детета и маскоте, и указали да се ове улоге могу појавити и у породичним системима у којима није идентификован проблем са алкохолизмом родитеља. Циљ овог истраживања био је да се испита предиктивна улога димензија породичне функционалности у односу на улогу коју испитаници као деца могу преузети у својим породицама. У истраживању је учествовало 147 испитаника старости од 18 до 25 година. У поступку прикупљања података коришћени су инструменти: FACES IV и Инвентар улога које деца у породицама преузимају. Ре-

зултати су показали да је димензија хаотичности значајан предиктор негативног смера улоге хероја, а позитивног смера улоге жртвеног јагњета. Индикатор породичне функционалности и димензија заплетености представљају значајне предикторе улоге маскоте, док су се у односу на улогу изгубљеног детета као значајни предиктори издвојили индикатор породичне функционалности и димензија ригидности. Сprovedено истраживање показује да је у предвиђању улога које деца могу преузимати у својим породицама важно разумети карактеристике породичних односа. С обзиром на то да нису све улоге повољне за онога ко их преузима (маскота и херој се сматрају позитивним, а жртвено јагње и изгубљено дете негативним), резултати овог истраживања могу имати практичне импликације за побољшање благостања најмлађих чланова породице. На основу сазнања да нижи ниво функционалности породичног система, а већа ригидност предвиђају улогу изгубљеног детета, док виши ниво хаотичности предвиђа улогу жртвеног јагњета, могу се развити прилагођене интервенције породичног саветовања. Хаос и ригидност означавају екстремне димензије флексибилности, те би породице које испољавају ове карактеристике имале користи од психолошке подршке, која би имала за циљ успостављање умереног нивоа флексибилности.