

Family emotional expressiveness and family structure

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The present paper scrutinizes the relationship between family emotional expressiveness (i.e., the tendency to express dominant and/or submissive positive and negative emotions) and components of family structure as proposed in Olson's Circumplex model (i.e., cohesion and flexibility, family communication, and satisfaction) in families with adolescents. The study was conducted on a sample of 514 Slovenian adolescents, who filled out two questionnaires: the Slovenian version of Family Emotional Expressiveness – FEQ and FACES IV. The results revealed that all four basic dimensions of family functioning were significantly associated with higher/more frequent expressions of positive submissive emotions, as well as with lower/less frequent expressions of negative dominant emotions. Moreover, expressions of negative submissive emotions explained a small, but significant amount of variance in three out of four family functioning variables (satisfaction, flexibility, and communication). The importance of particular aspects of emotional expressiveness for family cohesion, flexibility, communication, and satisfaction is discussed, and the relevance of present findings for family counselling is outlined.

Keywords: family emotional expressiveness, family cohesion, family flexibility, adolescents.

Family emotional expressiveness refers to the dominant style of non-verbal and verbal emotional expressions within the family (Halberstadt, Cassidy, Stifter, Park, & Fox, 1995). It includes general (mostly) parental tendencies of expressing emotions within various interactions in the family, which are not directed towards any particular family member. This creates a specific emotional climate, which is determined by numerous processes, but greatly by when, how much, and what types of emotions are expressed through the individual style of family members and the family as a whole (Halberstadt & Eaton, 2002). The particular style of emotional expressiveness of a family can vary with regard to the frequency of emotional expressions, their valence (i.e., positive vs. negative emotions), and intensity.

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In addition to the generally accepted differentiation between positive and negative emotions, many authors have embraced the distinction between so called *hard or dominant* and *soft or submissive* emotions (Dimidjian, Martell, & Christensen, 2002; Jacobsen & Christensen, 1996; Sanford, 2007). Hard (dominant) emotions, also known as “egoistic”, involve the expression of anger, contempt, and other negative emotions which are associated with the expression of assertive power and control over the other. Soft (submissive) emotions, on the other hand, are also named “prosocial”, and include feelings of sadness, disappointment, fragility, and other negative emotions associated with the experience or expression of vulnerability (Sanford, 2007). Whereas the distinction between these two groups of emotional intensity is easily perceived for negative emotions, the picture is less clear when it comes to positive emotions. Still, the presence of dominant positive emotions is characterized by more aggressive and assertive forms of expressing pride, admiration, or support for each other, while the presence of submissive positive emotions includes expressions of sympathy, readiness to help or to do a favour, etc. Thus, we may assume that the dominant–submissive distinction could also be valid for positive emotionality.

Each group of emotions has its own function and purpose in close family relationships. Moreover, different intensities of emotional expression certainly influence emotional relationships between family members. It tends to make a difference, for instance, whether emotions in conflict are expressed dominantly, as anger and hostility, or submissively, as feelings of dissatisfaction, disapproval, or grief. Gottman (1993) found that the expression of specific negative emotions during conflicts, such as contempt or disgust, significantly predicted destructive outcomes of conflicts in family relationships. As a matter of fact, expressing hard (positive or negative) emotions on the side of one family member may motivate other members of the family to protect themselves, because they perceive the other as aggressive and/ or harmful. In contrast, soft, submissive emotions support the expression of vulnerability, disability, and disappointment and indicate aspirations for social support.

Relevance of Emotional Expressiveness in Families with Children and Adolescents

A review of the literature considering the role of emotional expressiveness throughout the family life cycle reveals that extant research has mostly been focused on families with children, and only rarely dealt with families with adolescents. We will therefore firstly sum up important findings pertaining to the former type of families, and then try to consider the role of emotional expressiveness in the latter, which is more relevant for the present study.

Empirical data confirm that family emotional expressiveness has a specific impact on the child, especially in terms of creating a certain atmosphere which moderates children’s behavioural practices and the development of socioemotional (Darling & Steiberg, 1993) or moral competencies (Hoffman, 1983). Research shows that being raised in a family characterized by negative

affective interactions fosters negative emotionality and increased emotional responses (Eisenberg et al., 2003; Luebbe & Bell, 2014). In addition, specific associations between family emotional expressiveness and the child's emotional competencies have been highlighted (Halberstadt, 1986; Halberstadt & Eaton, 2002). In families with low emotional expression, a child who would like to practice effective emotional communication with other family members has to become sensitive to the most subtle expressions of emotional states and moods. In such a context of emotional inhibition, the child is likely to become less skilled in expressing emotions, but more competent in recognizing them. On the other hand, members of families which are highly emotionally expressive needn't put much effort in identifying emotional expressions, because the manifestations of emotions are clear and intense. Consequently, such individuals become more skilled in expressing emotions, yet less proficient in recognizing the emotions of others. Beyond that, research on social referencing clearly demonstrates that children rely on the valence of parental emotional expression not only for regulating their own expression and recognition of emotions, but also for guidance to whether the (social) environment is safe or not (Halberstadt & Eaton, 2002).

Turning to families with adolescents, the literature here focuses primarily on two issues: (1) the realignment of roles and responsibilities, which are renegotiated in order to achieve a more balanced distribution of power (Collins, 1992; Granic, Hollenstein, Dishion, & Patterson, 2016; Steinberg, 1990; Youniss & Smollar, 1985) and (2) the relationship between particular aspects of family-related emotional functioning (e.g., dyadic interactions) and adolescents' maladaptive behaviour and reactions, such as alcohol abuse (Soloski & Blake Berryhill, 2016), psychopathology (Koutra, Simos, Trilivia, Lionis, & Vgontzas, 2016), depression (e.g., Van der Giessen et al., 2014), and internalizing or externalizing problems (e.g., Granic et al., 2003). Only a handful of studies (e.g., Van Lissa et al., 2014; Vandeleur, Perres, & Schoebi, 2007) have hitherto evaluated the quality of everyday emotional exchange between specific family members (e.g., adolescents and their mothers, or daughters and their fathers) in the general population of families with adolescents, but none seem to have considered the relations between family emotional expressiveness and family functioning as a whole. Therefore, based on what we know about emotional expressiveness in families with preschool children, we have tried to extrapolate and formulate relevant conclusions for families with adolescents, as well. In doing so, we have relied on findings gained within two theoretical models: (1) the model of parental socialization strategies and (2) the social referencing model.

In line with the model of parental socialization strategies, it was found that adolescents' reports of higher levels of positive emotional expressions in families can be related to the parents' effort to control the level of negative and instead foster positive emotional expressiveness in the family (Čotar Konrad, 2011). Moreover, we have learned that familial disposition towards a specific style of emotional expressiveness may be more apparent for positive emotions, because there are fewer social constraints regarding their expression than there

are for expressing negative emotions (e.g., Halberstadt & Eaton, 2002). Overall, research suggests that positive emotions are related to optimal family functioning (Hilbert, 1994) and positive communication in families (Clark & Phares, 2004; McCarthy, Lambert, & Seraphine, 2004).

According to the findings obtained under the social referencing model, children use their parents' emotional expressions as verification of the safety of the environment (Halberstadt & Eaton, 2002). But, given that adolescents are more independent from their parents in that respect, we assume that they use parental emotional clues mainly to interpret the level of closeness and connectedness within the family environment (and not as confirmation of the safety of the outer world). Consequently, parental expressions of fear, worry, or even anger and hate, which accumulate over time, may be perceived by adolescents as indicating that the family is not a safe and supportive place. Moreover, the constant expression of negative dominant emotions can trigger self-protective mechanisms such as escape, distrust, doubt, and aggressiveness. These can lead to maladaptive behaviours (e.g., Halberstadt & Eaton, 2002; Luebke & Bell, 2014) and diminish the feeling of comfort and safety in family environment.

In sum, it seems that family emotional expressiveness can have a profound influence on adolescents, which extends beyond family boundaries and affects their socio-emotional functioning and adaptation in general. In the next section, we will bring family emotional expressiveness into relation with the structural elements of family life as defined by Olson (2011), again considering the specifics of families with adolescents.

Family Expressiveness and the Circumplex Model of the Family System

In his well-known and empirically validated Circumplex model of marital and family systems Olson (2011) initially identified two important aspects of family life: familial *cohesion* and *flexibility*. Cohesion is defined as the emotional bonding that exists between family members, whereas flexibility refers to the quality and expression of leadership and relationship rules, and the ability of the family to adapt to changes in role and power distribution in response to situational and developmental demands (Vandeleur et al., 2007).

Family cohesion can also be achieved through submissive emotional expressiveness. For example, if parents and adolescents mutually express more submissive emotions, they convey that they are more relationship-oriented and concerned and motivated to preserve relationships (Leary & Springer, 2001). In other words, they demonstrate behaviours which, in our opinion, strengthen family cohesion. On the other hand, we can assume that the presence of hard negative emotions in parent-adolescent relationships decreases family cohesion. An open expression of anger in conflicts between parents and adolescents involves blaming the other for the hurt, and motivates family members to (at least temporarily) terminate the relationship. Thus, expressing soft and submissive emotions of both valences may be the main vehicle of maintaining relationships and family cohesion. This does not mean that the presence of soft emotions

could completely overcome all negativity in challenging family communications such as parent – adolescent conflicts (Gottman, Coaña, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Weis & Heyman, 1997), but it may contribute to preserving a nonviolent family environment.

Family flexibility, meaning the ability to renegotiate family rules and relocate leadership and power, has an important impact on adolescents' striving for autonomy and independence. In order for this developmental task to be achieved the family has to develop an emotional atmosphere in which the adolescent wants to cooperate with his/her parents. Some studies (e.g., Forgatch & DeGarmo, 1999) indicate that in families with a positive emotional atmosphere children tend to cooperate more efficiently with parents than in a negative emotional context. Therefore, we assume that, if important developmental changes in the balance of power between parents and adolescents are to take place, positive emotional expressiveness needs to be present.

The Circumplex model proposes that families change levels of cohesion and flexibility through their cycle in time. These modifications are facilitated by *family communication* – a third element of the extended Circumplex model (Olson, 2011; Vandeleur et al., 2007). Family communication is defined as the ability of family members to openly communicate with each other, to empathically listen and show respect and appreciation for the emotions generated in the family (Olson, 2000). Effective family communication therefore also contains the ability of family members for emotional self-disclosure and exchange. Previous research (e.g., Olson, Russell, & Sprankle, 1983) has reported that positive communication also includes empathy, congruent messages, reassuring statements, and effective problem-solving skills. However, as adolescents strive for more autonomy and independence from their parents, the quality of family communication may be manifestly altered and compromised. For example, because of the adolescents' tendency to differ from their parents in many domains (Smetana, Crean, & Campione-Barr, 2005), conflicts become more frequent, whereby the adolescents' lack of experience in argumentation and conflict resolution can lead to such communications which are perceived by family members as less open, caring, and supportive, and more dysfunctional. This brings us to the fourth and last indicator of family functioning according to Olson (2011) – *family satisfaction*.

Family satisfaction refers to family members' general satisfaction with family closeness, adaptability, and mutual care (Olson, 2011). It entails a subjective assessment of the way a family solves problems and copes with stress, as well as satisfaction with the amount of time the family spends together and the quality of family communication in general (ibid). Research revealed (Caprara, 2005) that, if adolescents judge their relationship with parents as positive, affectionate, and constructive, they report higher family life satisfaction (Hesse, Rauscher, Roberts, & Ortega, 2014). In spite of the adolescents' tendency to spend more time with peers and to demonstrate their being different from other family members, the quality of family relations still remains the most important factor of adolescents' life satisfaction (Sepahmansour & Bayat, 2011), and

influences their healthy socio-emotional functioning beyond the family context (Gilman & Huebner, 2003). Given that family relations are also determined by emotional expressiveness, we assume that the latter bears significance for adolescents' family life satisfaction.

The Present Study

The main aim of the present study was to empirically test whether family emotional expressiveness is associated with family cohesion, flexibility, communication, and satisfaction, according to the above elaborated rationale, particularly in families with adolescents. In line with the considerations laid out in the previous section, we hypothesised that positive emotional expressivity would imply more coherent and close interpersonal relations, whereas negative expressivity would be related to more dysfunctions in the basic elements of family structure. In specific, we hypothesised that positive submissive emotional expressiveness will be positively related to family cohesion, flexibility, communication, and satisfaction (H1), and that negative dominant expressiveness will be negatively associated with the four basic dimensions of family functioning (H2). We also expected that the presence of positive submissive and the absence of negative dominant emotions in combination would yield the strongest prediction of the quality of family functioning (H3).

Method

Participants and Procedure

The present study included 514 participants (54.5 % female), aged between 14 and 19 ($M_{\text{age}}=16.4$; $SD=0.05$) and attending five different secondary schools across Slovenia. For the purpose of the study, we also gathered data about family type, number of siblings in the family, and birth order (see Table 1).

Table 1

Distribution of participants according to family type, number of siblings and sequence of birth.

	Distribution of families by family type ^a			
	Nuclear – F (%)	Single parent – F (%)	Reorganised – F (%)	
	442 (86)	46 (9)	26 (5)	
Families with...	Distribution of families by number of children ^b			
	One child – F (%)	Two children – F (%)	Three children – F (%)	Four and more children – F (%)
	287 (56)	77 (15)	128 (25)	20 (4)
Sequence of birth of participant	Distribution of participant by sequence of birth ^c			
	Firstborn – F (%)	Second born – F (%)	Third born – F (%)	Fourth born – F (%)
	268 (52)	190 (37)	46 (9)	10 (2)

$N = 514$; ^a $\chi^2 = 126.33$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.01$; ^b $\chi^2 = 60.08$, $df = 3$; $p < 0.01$; ^c $\chi^2 = 66.32$; $df = 3$, $p < 0.01$;

The most frequent type of a family, as reported by participants, is the nuclear family. Fewer adolescents live in single-parent homes or other types of families. According to available population statistics (SURS, 2002, Census), the sample may be considered as representative of the Slovenian population with regard to family type. Almost three-quarters of participants (71%) live in families with one or no sibling (Table 1), which is also similar to population statistics: according to Census (2002), 70% of families in Slovenia have one or two children. As is shown in Table 1, more than half of participants are first-borns, and almost a third of them are second-borns.

Preliminary analyses of group differences with respect to the recorded demographic variables didn't reveal any significant effects. Therefore, these variables were not included in further analyses.

Participation in the study was completely voluntary. Before data collection, the parents of adolescents who wanted to participate in the study were asked to sign an informed consent form. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from participation at any time, without revealing their reasons for doing so.

Measures

Family Expressiveness Questionnaire (FEQ) (Halberstadt, 1986). In this study we used the Slovenian version (Lamovec, 1988) of this 40-item instrument, which includes a 20-item subscale of positive family expressiveness (e.g., "Telling family members how happy you are") and a 20-item subscale of negative expressiveness (e.g., "Blaming one another for family troubles"). Each subscale is further divided in two subscales: dominant and submissive emotions. The instrument thus comprises the following four subscales: (1) *Positive dominant emotions (PDom)*, referring to the frequency of expressing affection, mutual forgiveness and support, as well as enthusiasm and admiration for other family members' success; (2) *Positive submissive emotions (PSub)*, relating to the expression of mutual gratitude, praise, sympathizing, willingness to help, to do a favour, talk about happiness, personal plans, and everyday events; (3) *Negative dominant emotions (NDom)*, which includes the expression of contempt, anger, and hatred, or uttering threats and criticism towards other family members; and (4) *Negative submissive emotions (NSub)*, which is about blaming each other, resenting other family members for their improper behaviour, and showing embarrassment, sadness, and disappointment caused by family members. Respondents were asked to assess the frequency of specific emotional expressions in their family on a scale of 1 (not at all frequent in my family) to 5 (very frequent in my family). The FEQ has evidenced solid internal and over-time reliability, as well as construct validity (e.g., Dunsmore, Bradburn, Costanzo, & Fredrickson, 2009; Eisenberg et al., 1991; Perlman, Camras, & Pelphrey, 2008). Alpha coefficients established in the present sample are acceptable to good for the four subscales (with values ranging from .71 to .84), and good for the *Negative emotions* (.83), and *Positive emotions* (.90) scales.

Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale (FACES IV) (Olson, Gorall, & Ties, 2006). The structure of the family was assessed using the Slovenian version of FACES IV (Svetina, Zabret, & Bajec, 2008). The instrument comprises 62 items, 7 of which evaluate balanced cohesion, and a further 7 balanced flexibility; 14 items are indicators of unbalanced cohesion (7 items for disengaged, and 7 for enmeshed cohesion), and 14 items evaluate unbalanced flexibility (7 items for rigid, and 7 items for chaotic flexibility); the family communication and the satisfaction with family relationships subscales are each evaluated by 10 items. Participants were asked to respond to the items on a five-point Likert scale (1 – not true of our family at all, 5 – absolutely true of our family).

Olson's (2011) validation study revealed good psychometric properties for FACES IV. The current study revealed mostly acceptable to good internal consistencies for the cohesion and flexibility (sub)scales: Cronbach's alpha is .84 for Cohesion, .72 for Flexibility, .83 for Disengagement, .67 for Enmeshment, .74 for Rigidity, and .63 for Chaotic Flexibility. Internal

consistencies are excellent for Communication and Satisfaction with family ($\alpha = .91$). As part of the Slovenian validation (Svetina et al., 2008), a CFA was performed and yielded satisfactory values for the proposed 6-factor model: $\chi^2 = 4429.81$, $df = 804$, $p < .001$; $RMSE = .068$; $CFI = .93$; $NNFI = .92$.

Results

Descriptives

Table 2 presents the descriptives for the four family emotional expressiveness variables (PDom, PSub, NDom, Nsub) and the four components of Olson's Circumplex model.

Table 2
Descriptives for family emotional expressiveness, cohesion and flexibility, communication and satisfaction

	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
PDom	488	1,10	5,00	3,41	,68	-,26 (0.11)	-,18 (0.22)
PSub	484	1,40	4,90	3,34	,62	-,28 (0.11)	-,00 (0.22)
NDom	485	1,00	5,00	2,36	,65	,73 (0.11)	,62 (0.22)
NSub	489	1,20	4,60	2,49	,59	,40 (0.11)	-,01 (0.22)
Cohesion	508	7,00	35,00	24,82	5,31	-,67 (0.11)	,55 (0.22)
Flexibility	510	7,00	37,00	22,73	5,02	-,32 (0.11)	,10 (0.22)
Communication	500	10,00	50,00	35,11	7,94	-,51 (0.11)	,25 (0.22)
Satisfaction	508	10,00	50,00	35,21	7,59	-,49 (0.11)	,26 (0.22)

Note. PDom = Positive dominant emotions; PSub = Positive submissive emotions; NDom = Negative dominant emotions; NSub = Negative submissive emotions; *Min* = Minimal value; *Max* = Maximal value.

Results show that, on average, positive emotions are more frequently expressed than negative emotions, and cohesion is slightly more balanced than flexibility.

Correlations

Pearson correlation coefficients between all study variables were calculated and are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Correlations between family emotional expressiveness and family functioning variables

	PSub	NDom	NSub	Cohesion	Flexibility	Communication	Satisfaction
PDom	.82**	-.31**	-.32	.58**	.47**	.61**	.47**
PSub		-.27**	-.37**	.65**	.51**	.64**	.51**
NDom			.37**	-.46**	-.37**	-.55**	-.55**
NSub				.10*	.03	.01	-.11
Cohesion					.69**	.81**	.76**
Flexibility						.68**	.63**
Communication							.84**

Note. PDom = Positive dominant emotions; PSub = Positive submissive emotions; NDom = Negative dominant emotions; NSub = Negative submissive emotions; ** = $p < .001$

The results in Table 3 reveal an array of statistically significant and substantial correlations between emotional expressiveness and family structure variables, except for negative submissive emotions. Positive expressivity, of both dominant and submissive emotions, shows mostly large positive associations with cohesion and flexibility, as well as with communication and satisfaction with family relationships. Dominant negative emotions exhibit medium to large negative associations with all family structure variables. Negative submissive emotions show only a small positive correlation with family cohesion and no significant relations to family flexibility, communication, and satisfaction.

Regression analyses

The predictive value of multiple aspects of family emotional expressiveness for cohesion, flexibility, communication, and satisfaction was explored via a series of four linear regression analyses. In each instance, all emotion expression variables (dominant and submissive positive and dominant and submissive negative emotions) were simultaneously entered as predictors. The criterion changed from family cohesion, to flexibility, to communication, and finally to family satisfaction. Standardized beta coefficients, R-squares, and changes in R-squares are reported in Table 4.

Table 4
Linear regression analyses predicting cohesion, flexibility, family communication, and satisfaction as a function of family emotional expressiveness

	Cohesion				Flexibility			
	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ² change	β	95 % CI <i>B</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ² change	β	95 % CI <i>B</i>
	.72	.51***			.57	.33***		
PDom			.05	-0.63, 1.37			.11	-0.28, 1.92
PSub			.52***	3.50, 5.57			.43***	2.32, 4.61
NDom			-.31***	-3.30, -1.85			-.16**	-2.07, -0.48
NSub			.02	-0.67, 0.98			-.12*	-1.93, -0.12
	Communication				Satisfaction			
	.76	.58***			.68	.47***		
PDom			.17**	0.70, 3.51			.06	-0.78, 2.21
PSub			.44***	4.29, 7.19			.42***	3.59, 6.67
NDom			-.35***	-5.40, -3.36			-.37***	-5.42, -3.26
NSub			-.10*	-2.56, -0.21			-.15*	-3.22, -0.76

Note. PDom = Positive dominant emotions; PSub = Positive submissive emotions; NDom = Negative dominant emotions; NSub = Negative submissive emotions; *R*² = Squared multiple correlation; β = Standardized regression coefficient; 95 % CI *B* = 95% confidence interval unstandardized regression coefficient; * = *p* <.05; ** = *p* <.01; *** = *p* <.001;

The four emotional expressiveness variables significantly explained all four criteria: over 50% of variance in family communication ($F_{(4,418)} = 145,83, p <0,001$) and cohesion ($F_{(4,424)} = 111,83, p <0,001$), slightly less for family

satisfaction ($F_{(4,422)} = 91,96, p < 0,001$), and one third for flexibility ($F_{(4,424)} = 51,77, p < 0,001$).

Analyzing the contribution of particular predictors, it becomes obvious that positive dominant emotions significantly predicted only family communication. Positive submissive emotions significantly predicted all four criteria and contributed most to the prediction. Additionally, considering negative emotionality, a significant contribution was observed in relation to all four criteria when it comes to negative dominant emotions. However, negative submissive emotions had only a marginal role in predicting flexibility, communication, and satisfaction, and no significance in predicting family cohesion. To sum up, results indicate that the simultaneous presence of positive submissive and absence of negative dominant emotion expressions is predictive of a more balanced family functioning.

Discussion

Knowledge and awareness of how emotions are handled in family interactions might provide important information regarding family functioning, especially in families with adolescents. The adolescents in our sample generally reported a higher frequency of positive vs. negative emotional expressions in their families, meaning that they perceive their families mostly as a supportive, safe, and encouraging emotional place. One possible reason for the greater presence of positive emotional expressivity are the emotional socialization strategies of parents (Halberstadt & Eaton, 2002), whereby parents control the level of negative emotional expressions and support the level of positive emotionality in order to fulfil the demands of the sociocultural environment.

In this study, we specifically addressed the relationship between family emotional expressiveness and family structure, i.e., family cohesion, flexibility, communication, and satisfaction. We assumed that positive submissive emotional expressiveness will be positively related to all four dimensions of the Circumplex model of family functioning (H1), whereas a negative correlation was expected between the latter and negative dominant expressiveness (H2). Both hypotheses were borne out by the results, which indeed revealed significant positive correlations between submissive positive emotions and the four family functioning variables (cohesion, flexibility, communication, and satisfaction), and significant negative correlations between them and negative dominant emotions. However, positive dominant emotions were found to be almost equally strongly related to the four family functioning variables as positive submissive emotions. Additionally, a significant but small correlation was observed between negative submissive emotions and family cohesion.

In line with our last but most specific hypothesis, the results showed that balanced family functioning can best be predicted by the simultaneous presence of positive submissive and absence of negative dominant emotions (H3). This was most obvious for family cohesion, satisfaction, and communication. Beyond that, *negative submissive* emotions also showed some relevance in predicting

family flexibility, satisfaction, and communication, the last of these three dimensions also being significantly predicted by the expression of *positive dominant* emotions.

Considering the observed patterns of relationships for each of the four family functioning variables separately, the following may be noted: The results confirm our expectation that *cohesion* in the families of adolescents is contingent on expressions of mutual gratitude, sympathizing, willingness to help and care (i.e., on elements of positive submissive expressiveness), and that at the same time it is likely to diminish with expressions of blame, hate, disgust, resentment, and other negative dominant emotions, which probably convey to adolescents an overall feeling of emotional disappointment, confusion, and distrust. Our study further indicates that family *flexibility*, as the ability of the family to renegotiate and change roles, rules, and the power hierarchy, is associated with an atmosphere of positive submissive emotional expressiveness and with the absence of negative – both dominant and submissive – expressiveness. It should be noted, however, that of all the dimensions of family functioning, flexibility seems to “suffer the least negative impact” of the expression of negative dominant emotions – maybe because such emotions have to be uttered at some point in order to initiate the changes which are then recognized as the family’s flexibility. The results observed for family *satisfaction* conform with previous findings (Kuppens, Realo, & Diener, 2008) and suggest that the adolescents’ overall feeling of satisfaction with family life is rather sensitive to the presence of negative emotions, be they dominant or submissive, and fostered only by submissive, but not dominant expressions of positive emotions. In order to achieve cohesion and flexibility, positive family *communication* has to be practiced. Our results confirm that emotional expressiveness is closely related to a healthy and efficient communication in the family. In fact, both valences (positive and negative) and intensities (dominant and submissive) of emotional expressiveness significantly predict family communication. In other words, beyond our expectations, a higher expression of positive dominant and lower expression negative submissive emotions also seems to bear significance for a positive communication style in the family. Still, the ability of family members to listen to each other, self-expose and exchange congruent messages (which is Olson’s definition of family communication) is best predicted by the expression of positive submissive emotions. This is understandable, since such expressions may elicit more empathy and enable family members to develop a better understanding for each others emotions and intentions (Halberstadt & Eaton, 2002). Almost equally important for a positive communication in families with adolescents, however, is that family members withdraw from frequent expressions of negative dominant emotions, i.e., that they down-regulate anger, contempt, and the need to criticize each other.

In sum, the results of the current study, in line with previous ones (e.g., Smetana et al., 2005), show that adolescents who experience an effective and balanced family functioning, are not faced with more dominant positive emotional expressions in their families (e.g., expressions of enthusiastic approval from their parents, admiration for their success, etc.), but do experience frequent

and constant positive submissive expressiveness, such as happiness, affection, gratitude, and readiness to help and support them in their plans and aspirations. At the same time, it seems that adolescents' perceptions of family functioning are rather sensitive to any negative emotionality expressed, even submissive and sophisticatedly communicated negative emotions between family members. This calls for particular mindfulness with regard to the expression of negative emotions in the relationship between parents and adolescents.

Limitations and Future Directions

Being the first to address the relationship between emotional expressiveness and family functioning in families with adolescents, the present study also faced some limitations. First, it is a cross-sectional study and thus cannot pick up relevant changes in family expressiveness and family structure throughout different phases of the family cycle. A second limitation arises from the fact that the study included only the adolescents' but not their parents' perceptions of family emotional expressiveness and family functioning. Although the use of questionnaires in assessing these variables is a common and valid research approach, the data would have been more objective and valid if a triangulation method (i.e., gaining data from parental perceptions and from observations of the family) had been applied. Still, research (e.g., Fletcher, Steinberg, & Williams-Wheeler, 2004) has shown that adolescents' perceptions (vs. their parents' perceptions) are more predictive of their adaptive behaviour, which speaks in favour of the validity of our data, gained via participants' self-reports.

Future research is needed to establish whether the present results can be replicated, since at this point there are no studies which allow for a comparison of findings. On top of that, it might be useful to consider in more detail the role of negative submissive and positive dominant emotions, which unexpectedly surfaced as significant predictors of certain family functioning variables.

Conclusions

The present study offers a first insight into the role of family emotional expressiveness with regard to balanced functioning of families with adolescents. Most generally, it reveals that the basic dimensions of family functioning, as proposed in Olson's Circumplex model, are most saliently predicted by the presence of positive submissive and the absence of negative dominant emotions. This finding stresses the need for family counsellors and other professionals who work with families and/or adolescents, to understand how the structural and dynamic aspects of family functioning are related to (and possibly affected by) the predominant style of expressing emotions within the family. Considering family emotional expressiveness in psychological interventions might be a vital element in helping families achieve a more balanced family structure. Learning to "express the right emotions in the right way" could well act as a protective factor against family dysfunctions and generally improve adolescents' psychological health.

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