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## ***Parenthood Regret – Definition, Measurement, and the State of the Art***

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### **Abstract:**

This introductory presentation provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of research on parenthood regret, synthesizing findings across psychology, sociology, and cultural studies. The definitional complexities of parenthood regret vary across disciplines. Psychological research focuses on the emotional and cognitive dimensions of regret, often framing it as a consequence of identity crises, unmet expectations, or inadequate coping strategies. Sociological perspectives emphasize the role of cultural norms, systemic inequalities, and social pressures in shaping regret, while cultural studies explore its representation in narratives and public discourse. Recent advancements in the measurement of parenthood regret enable precise assessments of regret intensity and facilitate cross-cultural and longitudinal studies, providing insights into its predictors and psychological mechanisms. Our presentation underscores the need for destigmatization and integration of parenthood regret into psychological practice, including developing targeted interventions for parents experiencing regret and preventive measures for prospective parents. As the first presentation in this symposium, it sets the stage for further exploration of the antecedents, experiences, and implications of parenthood regret.

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***Distinguishing Parenthood Regret from Parental Burnout: Conceptual, Empirical, and Clinical Perspectives***

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**Abstract:**

This presentation offers an incremental investigation of the distinction between parenthood regret (PR) and parental burnout (PB), based on findings from several complementary studies. While both constructs reflect distress in the parental role, they have been explored in separate research domains. We begin by comparing their theoretical definitions, emotional profiles, and contextual specificities. We then present empirical evidence from mixed-method studies—including qualitative data, latent profile analyses, and confirmatory factor analyses—supporting their conceptual distinctiveness. Longitudinal analyses further show that PR predicts PB, but not the reverse, and that only PB leads to severe outcomes such as suicidal ideation, neglect, and child-directed violence. Additional findings demonstrate that PB and PR have distinct consequences for the parent–child relationship and for child behavior, and that their prevalence varies across cultural contexts. We conclude by outlining key clinical implications and future research directions, especially the need for targeted interventions for parents experiencing burnout, regret, or both.

Marisa Matias<sup>1</sup>

***The Hidden Load of Parenting: A Mediation Model linking Role Restriction, Burnout, and Regret***

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**Abstract:**

Parenthood is often a meaningful life role, but for many parents, it can be a source of significant strain and self-doubt. Recent studies suggest that parental burnout and parenthood regret are distinct yet interconnected emotional states that may emerge when the realities of parenting conflict with personal goals. Building on previous work, pointing out that parental burnout is an antecedent of parental regret, we explored whether parental role restriction (i.e., the sense that parenting limits one's ability to invest in other important life domains) predicts parenthood regret via parental burnout. Using cross-sectional data from 314 Portuguese parents (64% of mothers and 36% of fathers) cohabiting with at least one child under 18 years, a mediation model was tested. Our findings point to preliminary support that parental burnout functions as the pathway through which perceived role restriction increases the likelihood of experiencing regret about becoming a parent. These findings highlight the emotional costs of perceived role sacrifice and the cumulative burden it can have on parents. This research calls attention to the importance of recognizing the less visible dimensions of parental strain and highlights the value of developing interventions that reduce burnout and support parents in maintaining a sense of balance in their investments across life domains.

Doris Erbe<sup>1</sup>

## ***Regretting Parenthood and Depression***

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### **Abstract:**

The experience of regretting parenthood is still associated with stigma. Limited knowledge currently exists about the prevalence and the underlying factors influencing this phenomenon in Germany. This study examines the relationships between regret over parenthood and factors such as depression, value of children, demographic variables, and socio-economic background. A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted using data from the 12th wave of the German Relationship and Family Panel (pairfam). The sample consisted of 2100 individuals ( $M = 40.29$  years; 62% female, 38% male). Eleven percent of the participants reported that they would not or would rather not choose to have children again. Regretting parenthood was associated with a younger parental age, an older age of the youngest child, more pronounced depressive symptoms, higher perceived psychosocial costs of the children, and lower socio-economic status; however, it was not associated with relationship status, gender, or perceived benefits of parenthood. Targeted information campaigns should educate young people about the optimal conditions for starting a family and aspects of life planning to prevent regret over parenthood.

Ziwen Teuber<sup>1</sup>, Elouise Botes<sup>1</sup>, & Julia Reiter<sup>2</sup>

***Feeling Seen, Feeling Joyful: An Intensive Longitudinal Study on Parenting Joy, Perceived Partner Responsiveness, and Their Role in Parental Regret***

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**Abstract:**

The Christmas season, particularly for parents, is an emotionally intense period that offers a valuable window into family dynamics. Drawing on a positive psychology perspective, we investigated how parenting joy and perceived partner responsiveness during this time related to parental regret, a taboo topic with wide-ranging, negative consequences. We collected 35 days of experience sampling data, complemented by baseline and follow-up measures, from 269 parents in the United Kingdom ( $N = 13,249$  observations). Using dynamic structural equation modelling (DSEM), we examined the within-person associations between momentary parenting joy and momentary perceived partner responsiveness. At the between-person level, we explored how participants' average levels of these momentary experiences predicted changes in parental regret over time. DSEM revealed a unidirectional, positive association from perceived partner responsiveness to parenting joy at the within-person level. At the between-person level, higher average levels of joy and responsiveness were associated with reduced parental regret from baseline to follow-up, after controlling for relevant sociodemographic variables. These findings contribute to the emerging literature on parental regret by emphasizing the role of daily emotional experiences and partner dynamics in shaping how parents evaluate their parenting during emotionally demanding periods.

Nicola Carone<sup>1</sup> & Jacopo Tracchegiani<sup>2</sup>

***The intergenerational impact of dismissing and unresolved attachment states of mind on maternal parenthood regret***

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**Abstract:**

Parenthood regret is a complex phenomenon with significant psychological and relational consequences for parents and their children. Although prior research has highlighted the impact of early attachment experiences on adjustment to the parental role, very little is known about their influence on parenthood regret. This study examined the association between adult attachment states of mind and parenthood regret in 120 cisgender, heterosexual mothers (74.17% partnered) residing in Italy with their biological children aged 0–18. Participants completed the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) and the Parenthood Regret Scale (PRS). Attachment classifications from the AAI (secure/autonomous, dismissing, preoccupied, unresolved) were analyzed in relation to PRS scores. Mothers classified as dismissing or unresolved with respect to loss or abuse reported significantly higher levels of regret compared to secure/autonomous mothers. Qualitative analyses of AAI narratives further revealed that elevated regret was associated with difficulties integrating attachment experiences marked by neglect, rejection, or abuse, often accompanied by defensive exclusion or disorganization of affect. These findings underscore the central role of attachment mental states in shaping maternal parenthood regret and emphasize the importance of interventions that address the intergenerational impact of unresolved trauma and adverse attachment histories on the parental role.

Gerardo Meil<sup>1</sup>, Pedro Romero-Balsas<sup>1</sup>, & Dafne Muntanyola-Saura<sup>2</sup>

## ***Comparing Regretting Motherhood and Fatherhood in Spain and Its Causes***

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### **Abstract:**

In this presentation, we 1) examine the extent of parental regret in Spain and 2) analyze how factors such as intensive parenting, the use of care resources, economic and employment conditions, and satisfaction with one's partner influence regret among mothers and fathers. The analysis is based on the QUIDAN Survey, conducted online with parents of children under 7. A total of 3,100 participants were interviewed, with a balanced sample by gender and child's age, and proportionally distributed by education and region. For this study, we used two weighted subsamples: 1,374 fathers and 1,376 mothers. Hypotheses were tested using logistic regression. Among mothers, intensive parenting—understood as time spent on childcare—is not linked to greater regret. What matters more is the perception that motherhood has harmed their career. Consistent with Donath (2016), dissatisfaction with one's partner and the overall family project also increases maternal regret. Among fathers, regret is more likely when their traditional role as primary breadwinner is undermined—for example, by career setbacks, high reliance on grandparents for childcare, or dissatisfaction with their partner. No link was found between regret and intensive fathering. Findings show that paternal regret is relatively limited and similar in prevalence to maternal regret. While family and work conditions matter for both, paternal regret is directly tied to employment, whereas maternal regret is more closely related to perceived career damage, regardless of current work status. We will also briefly present preliminary descriptive findings from the second wave of the QUIDAN survey (June 2025).

Jacopo Tracchegiani<sup>1</sup> & Nicola Carone<sup>2</sup>

***Parenthood Regret in the Age of Climate Crisis: Developmental and Contextual Risk Factors Among Primary Caregiving Mothers***

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**Abstract:**

Parenthood regret refers to parents' feelings that the decision to have children was a mistake. Despite its growing relevance in literature, its links with early attachment experiences and contemporary environmental stressors remain underexplored. This study investigates how childhood attachment disorganization and role reversal, together with concern about the climate crisis, contribute—both independently and interactively—to parenthood regret. A cross-sectional study was conducted with 452 cisgender, heterosexual, primary caregiving mothers ( $M = 41.30$ ;  $SD = 6.60$ ) of preschool-aged children ( $M = 3.85$ ;  $SD = 1.40$ ). Results revealed that climate crisis concerns significantly predicted higher parenthood regret. Moreover, a significant interaction was found between climate crisis concern and childhood disorganization with the mother—but not the father—on levels of regret. Simple slopes analysis showed that mothers who experienced greater disorganization in the relationship with their own mother regretted their parenthood the most, particularly when they were also concerned about the climate crisis. This study is the first to suggest that existential fears related to the climate crisis may intensify parenthood regret in mothers who experienced early relational vulnerabilities. Findings underscore the need for integrated psychological interventions addressing both developmental vulnerabilities and contemporary climate-related distress to support parental role adequately.



Paweł Ciesielski<sup>1</sup>, Qing-Wei Chen<sup>2</sup>, Petra Coufalová<sup>3</sup>, Silvia Di Battista<sup>4</sup>, Fiona Tasker<sup>5</sup>, Jorge Gato<sup>6</sup>

## ***Selected Predictors of Parental Regret – A Cross-Cultural Analysis***

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### **Abstract:**

Individuals who choose to remain childfree often face social pressure, prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion. Some, influenced by expectations from their environment, parents, or partners, decide to have children despite a lack of desire or even an aversion to parenthood. Research suggests that such individuals are more likely to experience parental regret. This study explores the role of social pressure, parental desires, and expectations in shaping parental regret. A cross-cultural analysis was conducted across six countries: Poland, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Italy, the Czech Republic, and China. Data were collected from a total of 952 individuals. Multilevel modelling was employed to analyse the relationships between variables. The results indicate that parental regret is significantly predicted by retrospectively perceived parental desires and perceived pressure to have children, but not by retrospectively perceived parental expectations. The fixed effects explained 12.9% of the variance in parental regret (Marginal  $R^2$ ), while accounting for country-level differences increased the explained variance to 29.9% (Conditional  $R^2$ ), highlighting considerable between-country heterogeneity. Further analyses revealed that perceived pressure to have children was a significant predictor of parental regret only within the Chinese sample. Moreover, participants from China reported higher average levels of parental regret compared to participants from the European countries. These findings suggest that perceived pressure to become a parent is a substantial predictor of parental regret in China, while retrospectively perceived parental desires emerge as a more universal predictor of lower parental regret across cultural contexts.

Valerie Heffernan<sup>1</sup>

***What can culture and the arts contribute to our understanding of maternal regret?***

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**Abstract:**

Since the publication of Israeli sociologist Orna Donath's pioneering research on mothers who regret the decision to have children, there have been a number of literary and artistic engagements with maternal regret. This paper compares two such examples: Merle Grimme and Felizitas Hoffman's documentary short *Regretting Motherhood* (2017) and Diana Karklin's photo-narrative project *Undo Motherhood* (2022). While both projects offering new insight into the difficulties many women face in coming to terms with the role of mother, the manner in which they represent the regret that these mothers feel is quite different. Through evocative imagery and voiceover, Grimme and Hoffmann's documentary offers the mothers an anonymous space in which to voice their regret. By contrast, Karklin's photos depict the regretful mothers engaged in their everyday activities, and the accompanying narrative anchors their regret within their personal and individual stories. My paper analyses the different approaches to representing regret in these two projects and reflects on how each contributes to our understanding of this taboo topic.