

THE HIDDEN FACE OF PARENTING: EMOTIONAL IMMATURITY

Tamara Dobrić^{1*}, Aleksandra Patrić¹

¹University of Priština in Kosovska Mitrovica, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of Pedagogy,
Republic of Serbia, e-mail: tamara.dobric@pr.ac.rs, aleksandra.andric@pr.ac.rs



Abstract: Emotionally immature parents manifest a markedly distinct constellation of behavioral, emotional, and attitudinal characteristics. These individuals frequently exhibit egocentrism, constrained empathy, an excessive orientation towards self, an aversion to emotional expressions and intimacy. They often demonstrate an inability to recognize and appropriately respond to the needs of their offspring, leading to a predilection for tense and conflict-laden familial environments. Such dynamics are exacerbated by the parents' aversion to genuine emotional engagement, which in turn impedes their capacity for self-reflection. Interactions with these parents are characteristically unidirectional and markedly lacking in depth. This study delineates four archetypes of emotionally immature parents: the emotionally driven parent, characterized by a reliance on personal feelings and a predisposition towards anxiety; the control-oriented parent, who imposes a rigid oversight on their children's lives, dismissing their interests in favor of stringent goal orientation; the passive parent, predominantly self-engaged and frequently aligning with similarly immature personalities, exhibiting a tendency to capitulate to more dominant figures; and the rejecting parent, who displays a disinclination towards engaging in time with their offspring, finding solace in solitude and the pursuit of personal desires. This discourse aims to elucidate the phenomenon of parental emotional immaturity, outlining the primary traits of such parents and categorizing the distinct typologies thereof. The goal of this paper is to provide a comprehensive description and theoretical explication of the characteristics and classifications of emotionally immature parents.

Keywords: child, parent, parental emotional immaturity

Field: Social and humanistic sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of child-rearing within family units where parents exhibit emotional immaturity can give rise to negative outcomes. Despite the outward normalcy and attention to the physical well-being of their offspring, such parents' failure to forge an emotional bond may instill a significant emotional void in the child (Gibson, 2022, pp. 1-2). It is intrinsic for children to seek the affection of their parents under all circumstances, necessitating respect, protection, and reliability (Bosko, 2022, p. 22). Affection serves as the pivotal resource enabling families to manage their emotional interactions effectively (Samjuel, 2023, p. 18). The manner in which parents manifest their emotions indirectly influences the modalities through which children articulate their feelings towards peers and other individuals (Минић, 2020, p. 77). In healthful family environments, parents engage with their children through diverse avenues, including play, humor, the fostering of individual talents, and the promotion of physical well-being, all underpinned by trust and empathy (Milojković, Srna, & Mićović, 1997, p. 144). When parents are affectionate, gentle, and responsive to their children's needs, offering love and warmth, it cultivates trust in the child towards others and equips them with the skills to navigate various situations adeptly. In contrast, a parent's inability to respond emotionally to their child's requirements, failing to provide sufficient affection and warmth, may leave the child ill-equipped to face new, stressful, or uncomfortable challenges (Компировић, 2021, p. 38). An early childhood devoid of emotional connectivity with parents may subsequently engender trust issues or reluctance towards full engagement in friendships or romantic relationships, culminating in diminished self-esteem and imbalanced interpersonal relations. The absence of an emotional bond with parents carves a vacancy within the child's emotional sphere (Роки, Роки & Кузма, 2023, p. 129). Numerous parents remain oblivious to the fact that their ostensibly benevolent but misguided actions can obstruct the normal developmental trajectory of their child and inflict psychological distress (Јовановић, 1997, p. 122). Emotional emptiness and loneliness constitute a fundamental pain, akin to physical injuries, albeit invisible from the outside. Their loneliness can persist into adulthood if they continue to choose relationships that fail to provide sufficient emotional connection. Such individuals, even as they mature, may engage in work, marry, and raise children, yet continue to be accompanied by a sense of emotional isolation (Gibson, 2022, p. 2).

*Corresponding author: tamara.dobric@pr.ac.rs



2. CHARACTERISTICS OF EMOTIONALLY IMMATURE PARENTS

Emotionally immature parents exhibit a completely different set of characteristics in terms of behavior, mentality, and emotions. They fear genuine emotion and emotional closeness. Their immaturity renders them inconsistent and unreliable, often oblivious to the needs of their children (Gibson, 2022). These parents foster a tense and conflictual psychodynamic and an uncomfortable family atmosphere. When a child errs, they react impatiently, intolerantly, inducing insecurity and dependency in the child (Ilić, 2010, p. 141). They are rigid and impulsive, frequently at a loss on how to confront reality. They assess situations in a subjective, not objective manner. Their primary concern is their feelings over the actual occurrences. They are egocentric and obsessively self-involved, living in a constant state of insecurity, fearing exposure, while their defensive demeanor is staunchly upheld to prevent others from getting too close. The thought processes of emotionally immature parents are literal and routine. They are prone to discussing what happened but not their feelings or ideas (Gibson, 2022).

There are three fundamentally erroneous attitudes of parents: Complete disregard for feelings – parents who interpret their children’s disturbances as trivial. They do not take the emotional crises of children seriously, neither attempting to address them nor striving to impart emotional skills; Excessively indulgent – these parents recognize how their children feel but believe that emotional crises are beneficial for the child. They rarely manage to point out even a single emotional reaction to the child; Contemptuous parents who disrespect their children’s feelings – These parents are predominantly judgmental. They are very strict and punish their children, capable of penalizing the child for even the slightest unrest (Ilić, 2010, pp. 141-142). A central characteristic of emotionally immature parents is limited empathy. Having lost touch with their deeper feelings, they often lack empathy for the feelings of others. They are exclusively self-focused, enjoying being the center of attention. They do not engage in self-reflection; their goal is not to understand themselves but to be the center of attention (Gibson, 2022). Communication with emotionally immature parents is mostly one-way. They show no interest in mutual, two-way communication. They predominantly seek attention and wish to have everyone interested in what attracts them (Gibson, 2022).

3. DIFFERENT TYPES OF EMOTIONALLY IMMATURE PARENTS

Children often experience loneliness and insecurity as a result of emotionally immature parents who are typically self-absorbed, emotionally unreliable, and narcissistic. Common traits include insensitivity, egocentrism, and a limited capacity for genuine emotional closeness (Gibson, 2022, p. 73). Gibson (2022) in her book **Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents** identifies four types of emotionally immature parents: emotional parents, driven parents, passive parents, and rejecting parents. Emotional parents are led by their feelings and are the most childlike of the four types. They depend on others and are consumed by anxiety. They are prone to terrifying instability and unpredictability, treating minor disturbances as catastrophic events (Gibson, 2022, p. 76). They view others as either their saviors or betrayers. Governed by emotions, they tend to see the world in black and white, often recalling unpleasant past events and holding grudges. They act helplessly, portraying themselves as victims, around whom family life revolves according to their mood. As a result, children of such parents learn to conform to the needs and desires of others, often being blindly obedient and accommodating to the feelings of others, even to their own detriment (Gibson, 2022, p. 79). This leads to the child developing the ability to impartially assess their own personality, relying on the opinions of parents and other adults about themselves (Piorkowska Petrović, 2008, p. 166).

Driven parents are overly busy and compulsively goal-oriented. They tend to control, interfere with, and dominate the lives of their children. They do not accept their children’s interests, often preferring to enforce their own desires. Such parents grew up in an emotionally deprived environment without emotional support. They were not taught to be pampered but to navigate life through their efforts. They often fear being embarrassed by their children’s failures, yet they cannot provide a secure foundation or assurance for their children to pursue success. Driven parents impose on their children the feeling of being constantly evaluated. Convinced they do most things best, they sometimes perform unusual actions, for example, paying bills for their adult children even though they are capable of doing so themselves (Gibson, 2022, pp. 80-81). Children of such parents often feel that they do little and that whatever they do is not good enough (Gibson, 2022, p. 82).

Passive parents, though not characterized by the anger or demanding nature prevalent among the other typologies, engender adverse repercussions. Within the dynamics of a family where a dominant partner is present, such parents might exhibit a failure to respond to manifest child abuse or neglect, addressing these issues by either tacit approval or diminution of the problem’s severity (Gibson, 2022, p.

77). Relative to their counterparts, these parents may appear more emotionally accessible, albeit within limited confines. As situations intensify, their emotional engagement recedes incrementally. Despite professing love for their offspring, their support falls short of sufficiency. They neither establish boundaries nor provide guidance conducive to their children's developmental needs (Gibson, 2022, p. 84). Historically conditioned to acquiesce to more assertive personalities, passive parents, in their adult roles, frequently overlook the imperative not merely to engage in recreational activities with their children but to fulfill caretaking and protective responsibilities. Consequently, during challenging life phases, they are prone to retreat into introspection or pursue other passive coping mechanisms to navigate adversities. Such parental figures may exhibit a tendency to forsake their children and family at the prospect of a more favorable existence during dire circumstances. The departure of a passive yet emotionally connected parent can inflict profound emotional wounds on a child, severing a bond with a deeply cherished individual. Offspring of such parents are predisposed to rationalize behaviors of abandonment exhibited by others (Gibson, 2022, p. 85).

Rejecting parents demonstrate a disinterest in engaging with their children, manifesting a stark indifference that instills in the child a belief that their absence would be preferable to their parents. This parental archetype is inclined towards punitive measures, particularly of a physical nature, representing the least empathetic of the parental models. Dominance within the household characterizes their familial role, with the familial atmosphere often centered around their predilections. Their predisposition towards irascibility instructs their children to maintain a distance, swiftly negating any attempts at eliciting gentle or emotional responses. Provocation of their reactions can escalate to hostility, and frequently, violence. Children of such aloof parents frequently perceive themselves as intrusions, readily forsaking their aspirations and harboring an acute sense of guilt for their mere existence (Gibson, 2022, pp. 86-87). This guilt, a direct outcome of emotional maltreatment, may evolve into a pervasive sense of shame in the progeny, eroding their self-worth and extinguishing any aspirations for acknowledgment and affection (Rocky, Rocky & Kuzma, 2023, p. 145). An excessive emotional detachment fails to satisfy the child's intrinsic needs for affection, attention, and tenderness, rendering the child's home environment as one of solitude, devoid of a sense of belonging. Such profound loneliness can stifle the development of sophisticated emotional capacities. Children subjected to such conditions may manifest aggression and a propensity for anger, a reaction to the frustration engendered by parental rejection. Furthermore, the emotional disconnection between parent and child can precipitate antisocial tendencies among older children. Parental behaviors characterized by avoidance, rejection, or neglect may culminate in juvenile delinquency (Piorowska Petrović, 2008, pp. 167-168).

4. CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of parental emotional immaturity has been extensively deliberated upon since historical times. Based on pedagogical-psychological literature, it is evident that emotional immaturity is most commonly found among parents who were raised in family environments that deprived them of their intellectual, physical, and emotional development. Consequently, they possess a limited sense of self, rendering them egocentric and unable to empathize with the needs and feelings of others. All four types of emotionally immature parents (emotional, driven, passive, or rejecting) are insensitive, self-centered, and emotionally unavailable to their children. They fear genuine emotions, attempting to control others for their comfort. Children react differently to immature parenting, but it unequivocally leaves negative impacts on every child. To successfully navigate relationships with emotionally immature parents, especially in adulthood, children need to recognize the level of their parents' maturity from an observational perspective, focusing on thought rather than reacting based on emotions. Establishing contact with an emotionally immature parent without being disturbed requires management, focusing on outcomes rather than the relationship, and expressing oneself regardless of the response.

REFERENCES

- Bosko, F. (2022). *Govoril su da sam preosetljiva*. Zemun: Publik praktikum, imprint Harmonija.
- Gibson, L. (2022). *Odrasla dec aemocionalno nezrelih roditelja*. Beograd: Finesa.
- Ilić, M. (2010). *Porodična pedagogija*. Banja Luka & Mostar: Filozofski fakultet Univerziteta u Banjoj Luci & Nastavnički fakultet Univerziteta „Džemal Bijedić“.
- Јовановић, П. (1997). *Родитељи и дете*. Панчево: Чигоја штампа.
- Компировић, Т. (2021). *Породица и социјалне компетенције деце*. Косовска Митровица: Филозофски факултет Универзитета у Приштини са привременим седиштем у Косовској Митровици.
- Минић, Ј. (2020). *Развој и породица између здравља и болести*. Косовска Митровица: Филозофски факултет Универзитета у Приштини са привременим седиштем у Косовској Митровици.

- Milojković, M., Srna, J., & Mićović, R. (1997). *Porodična terapija*. Beograd: Centar za brak I porodicu.
- Piorkowska Petrović, K. (2008). Uticaj vaspitnih stavova roditelja na poštovanje deteta. In Jovanović, B., & Stanojević, V. (Eds.), *Praktikum za školsku I porodičnu pedagogiju* (pp. 165-168). Jagodina: Pedagoški fakultet u Jagodini.
- Роки, Н., Роки, Р., & Кузма, К. (2023). Припадање. Београд: „Препород“.
- Samjuel, Dž. (2023). *Svaka porodica ima svoju priču*. Beograd: Laguna.