

#MomShaming

Mom-shaming happens when someone judges a mother for how she chooses to parent or tells her to do it a different, or better, way. While this practice may seem startling, it is more common than people think.

By Abby Goretsky



Photo by [Jonathan Borba](#) from [Pexels](#)

When she first had her children, Jennifer Smith Daniel was part of a friend group in which everyone had kids. Some of the mothers worked, but some didn't. Daniel heard one of the

stay-at-home moms telling a working one that she “couldn’t understand how you could send your kids off to be raised by someone else.” In return, Daniel found herself thinking that she couldn’t understand how someone could stay home and use their brain to do nothing but watch “Sesame Street.”

What Daniel and the other mother were engaging in, whether they knew it or not, was mom-shaming – an act in which mothers are criticized for their parenting decisions. It could focus on foods they feed their children, the amount of screen time they allow, educational choices and more. It happens for just about everything.

Margaret Quinlan, co-author of “You’re Doing it Wrong! Mothering, Media, and the Medical Expertise,” defines mom-shaming as bullying mothers for their parenting choices.

“It can be passive aggressive or it can be more overt with sort of tearing other individuals down,” Quinlan said.

A CBS News nationwide poll of 475 mothers found that mom-shaming is a familiar experience for most mothers with younger kids, and the major areas of criticism are discipline, diet and nutrition, sleep, breastfeeding versus bottle feeding, safety and child care. Most of the criticism comes from the mother’s parents, a spouse or the child’s other parent, or in-laws.

As a single mother, Daniel felt as though people wanted a “redemption story” after her divorce. She said people seemed to think she couldn’t do everything on her own and would frequently mention her “next husband.”

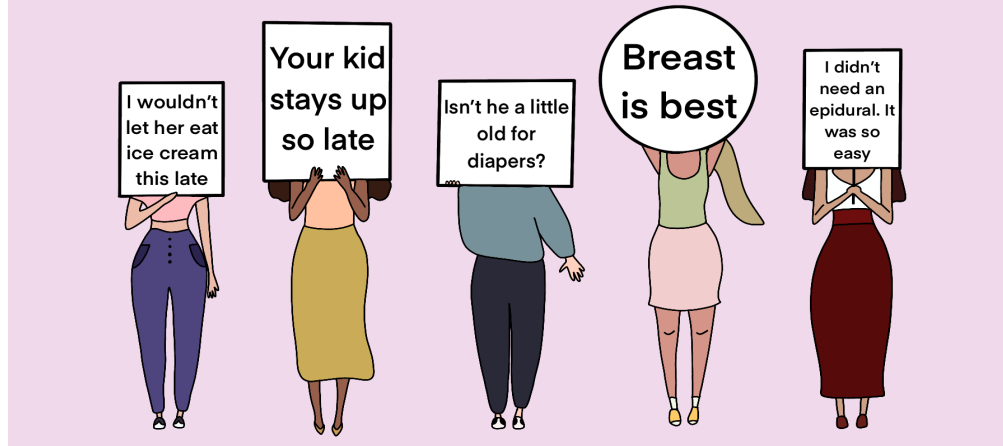
“People really struggle with that,” Daniel said. “This idea that somehow I’m making my own money and I pay my own bills and I do it myself. That’s not easy for them.”

Other moms are sometimes shamed by the child’s family.

Hadlea Presson, a new mom, found that she was being shamed by her baby’s father’s mother. Presson chose to mainly feed her baby breast milk through pumping rather than straight from her breast. The father’s mother disagreed with the choice and would continually mention reasons Presson should change her methods.

“It almost makes me feel as if I’m wrong for pumping his milk,” Presson said. “Although he is still receiving the benefits from breast milk.”

Types of Mom-Shaming



Things that people can say to mom-shame.

Illustrated by: Abby Goretsky

Mom-shaming has worsened as a result of social media. And the pandemic has only exacerbated the problem.

Quinlan said the “added layer of stress” from COVID-19 has emphasized for her how unsupported mothers are today.

“I have male colleagues who say to me that they’re really going to miss the pandemic because they’re going to miss being able to take naps,” Quinlan said. “I can’t remember the last time I took a nap or had that sort of luxury.”

On the other hand, Anne-Marie Iselin, an assistant professor of psychology at Elon University, found that the pandemic has caused her to have moments when she shames herself. When she

has meetings or important emails she has to deal with, so she puts her kids in front of the TV to watch something, which makes her feel terrible.

“I feel guilty about it, and I’ve just come to terms with that,” Iselin said. “I’ve done everything that I can and there’s only so much I can do.”

While the pandemic may have highlighted the problems with mom-shaming, the issue has been around as far back as the 1800s.

For her book, Quinlan and her co-author researched newspapers, magazines and doctors’ records from the 19th century that mentioned women’s reproduction and found striking similarities between then and now, especially when it comes to reproductive challenges and infertility.

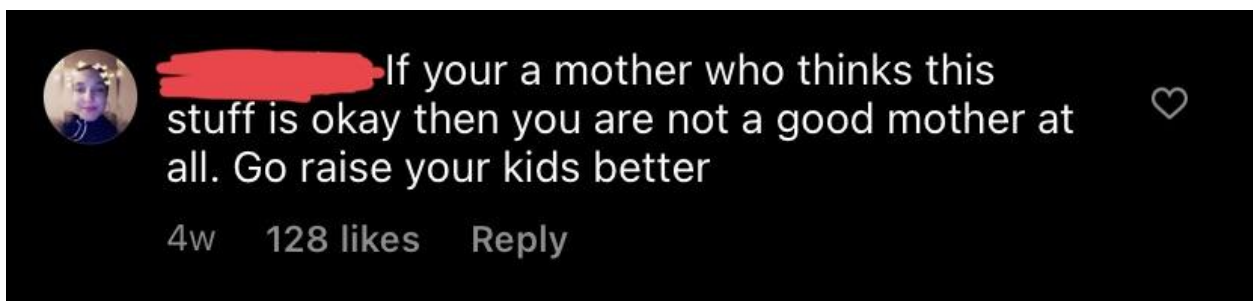
“A lot of the same myths that we saw about parenting, about mothering that we saw in the 1800s we still see today,” Quinlan said.

Women were advised to deal with reproductive challenges or infertility by relaxing. Quinlan even said that they found old medical records of doctors telling women to work less because stress can affect reproduction. She saw a trend where people placed most of the blame on the woman.

“It’s easier to just say, ‘Oh, relax,’ but we all know just relaxing isn’t going to open fallopian tubes,” Quinlan said.

With the many similarities between mom-shaming in the past and today, it's important to note the addition of social media, which has amplified the critics. Quinlan said that she believes social media is one reason people mom-shame.

“Everybody who is confident appears as an expert,” Quinlan said. “Everybody sees themselves as an expert, and so they feel confident to be able to give their medical advice or other parenting advice on these platforms.”



A mom-shaming comment on a mother's Instagram picture of her daughter painting her son's nails.

Photo by Abby Goretsky

But social media isn't all bad. There are many mom accounts and groups that give advice and provide a place for women to communicate. Quinlan said someone could post an article about having trouble breastfeeding, and within five minutes hear back from a lactation consultant, a mom who breastfed and even a pediatrician.

Social media may have a negative impact on mothers, but Quinlan, Iselin and Daniel believe that there is still a place for it in the parenting world. Daniel said it is a good place for mothers to share information about schools, health issues and more, especially during the pandemic.

“Yes we shame, but there is no other information network that’s better than mommies,” Daniel said. “Mommies know everything about everything.”

Daniel also feels the need to judge others less now that she is more comfortable as a mother.

Iselin said that mom-shaming doesn’t change her mind on being a mom, even though it will likely always be prevalent.

“No amount of shame would ever stop me from wanting to be a mom,” Iselin said. “So I hope that other moms feel so empowered and that they’re able to just focus on their own joys and their own ways that they’re raising their own unique children.”