

The Motherload

A Report On The
State of Moms Today



Further&Further

We are a team of 16 SENIOR RESEARCHERS, PRODUCERS, and FILMMAKERS.

Based in Montreal, Portland, Chicago and NYC, we are obsessed with delivering authentic exploratory research.

We have a unique immersive ethnographic approach to qualitative research, focusing on one project at a time, building trust with our subjects, spending real time in their world and following the story wherever it takes us..

Because the truth has never been harder to find.



introduction

Being a mother has never been an easy task.

But over the last few months, our team has been having a lot of conversations about how absolutely exhausted - and seemingly on the verge of a breakdown - most mothers seem to be, this far into the pandemic.

We're not foolish enough to try to tackle the incredibly complex topic of motherhood overall.

But we were curious why things seem to be at a tipping point right at this moment - why we're seeing more conversations, more grief, more anger & things like more and more mothers running for office.

So: we talked to women all over the US, Canada, and the UK about the realities of their world - what's changed about their role as a parent, what their everyday joys and low points look like, and how they're navigating the emotional swings of their current existences.

This is their story.





before the
pandemic
THINGS SEEMED TO
BE GETTING BETTER
FOR WOMEN

REPORT MAY 10, 2019
**Breadwinning Mothers
Continue To Be the U.S.
Norm**

"It's always been hard to balance being a mom and having a career - but things felt like they were getting a little bit better. There was daycare at work. There was a promise of progress - that we were starting to build the infrastructure, the language and the support system to make balancing the two a little easier."

In the years before the pandemic, women in the US, UK and Canada were beginning to outpace men in participation in post-secondary education, and represented a growing portion of the workforce - and leadership positions.

More women were the primary earners in their households.

More men were becoming stay-at-home dads.

More conversations were being had about equal division of labor at home.

More workplaces were starting to adopt policies to help working parents - such as better paternity leave, and daycare options in the work place.

The balance of being a working parent has always been tough to achieve - this isn't a new problem.

But it felt like things were steadily improving for women - with gains in autonomy, authority & overall resources.

but reality was

often
very different

***Young Men Embrace Gender Equality,
but They Still Don't Vacuum***

New studies show traditional views persist about who does what at home, and it's holding women back.

Women do 2 more hours of housework daily than men, study says

**Women's Unpaid Labor is Worth
\$10,900,000,000,000**

"Married American mothers spend almost twice as much time on housework and childcare than married fathers. And: although they're far more likely to be working now than in past decades, they spend more time on child care today than ever before."

But despite all the conversations about growing equality – the burden for women was still unequal.

Even in the most progressive of couples, women were almost always carrying a heavier load.

They were almost always doing more housework.

They were almost always the primary parent – the one in charge of remembering all the details of everyday life.

They were keeping the ship afloat – and quietly doing unpaid labor – both emotionally & domestically.

Women were making gains in the workplace ... but they didn't get to give up any of their duties at home.

"Progress" was being made – but it often made their burdens heavier, not lighter, with heavy career expectations on top of their roles as parents & partners.



**and few
seemed to be**

**TALKING
ABOUT IT**

"I joined a women's group when I moved to Germany a few years ago and all of the conversations were about the best strollers or the best bottles. Nobody was having genuinely honest talks about how tired they were, or how resentful they felt some days. The outlet for the real stuff just wasn't there."

Many of these women felt like they were treading water - trying to work like they didn't have kids at home, and parent like they didn't have a job.

But it was also the years of a lot of competition amongst moms.

The years of a lot of individual guilt, if you felt like you weren't maximizing your potential as both mother and laborer.

The years of mom shaming - and competition between moms.

It was the years of women not having a lot of honest conversations about how fucking hard it is "to have it all".

Talking about how stressful parenthood can be was still a taboo topic - one that makes you seem selfish, unnatural, abusive or whiny.

Talking about losing your temper with your children was a sign of being a bad mom.

Talking about how your kids sometimes drive you insane sometimes was verboten - or couched with quite a few "but they're the best thing that ever happened to me!"s.

Which: may be true. But women weren't being honest with themselves or each other.

A high-angle photograph of a woman with dark curly hair sitting on a laptop on a wooden floor. She is wearing a black top and is looking at the laptop screen. To her right, a child is sitting on a grey rug, playing with colorful toys. A smartphone is lying on the rug near the child. The scene is lit with natural light, creating shadows on the floor.

And then the pandemic hit ...

A woman with dark hair, wearing a blue top, is looking down with a serious expression. In the background, a baby is visible, looking to the left. The overall scene is dimly lit, suggesting an indoor setting.

& the weight of it

**Landed
squarely
on the
shoulders
of women**

"In April 2020, a study found US parents had nearly doubled the time spent on education and household tasks, from 30 to 60 hours, with women taking on a much greater share of this additional time."

"Girls and women are bearing the brunt of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has intensified pre-existing gender inequalities based on discriminatory gender stereotypes. The face of this crisis is female." - Unicef

As the pandemic spread and people went into lockdown, almost everyone was sequestered in their homes.

Parenting children and keeping a house in order has always been a difficult task during the best of times.

But during the pandemic, mothers were also expected to be tutors. To be tech support. To be all-day entertainment. To keep their children under the age of 5 safe and healthy, with no approved vaccine for them.

To cook every single meal, and to keep a house clean that was bursting at the seams, with more being expected of it than it was intended for.

It was a great equalizer of sorts amongst mothers. Even those with resources couldn't leave the house. Couldn't hire childcare. Couldn't send their kids to school.

Being a mom became all-consuming - a task that was endlessly depleting, without much to fill the tank back up.

The role of mothers expanded immensely, but at the same time ... moms had fewer resources & tools to rely on.

Cultural expectations of mothers didn't change - they were still expected to strive to attain the same standards for their kids.

And women were supposed to pull this off, while also working full-time jobs. It was impossible math.

and this led to

the GREAT EXPULSION

Nearly 3 million U.S. women have dropped out of the labor force in the past year

32% The percentage of women ages 25-44 who said child care was the reason for that unemployment.

Women's labor force participation hits 33-year low

Another generation of women will have to wait for gender parity, according to the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*. As the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be felt, closing the global gender gap has increased by a generation from 99.5 years to 135.6 years.

We sacrificed working moms to survive the pandemic; it's time to share the burden

U.S. moms working full-time are paid \$0.75 for every dollar paid to fathers,

66% The number of mothers with partners who say they are chiefly responsible for child care, compared to 24% of fathers.

The "She-Cession" Persists, Especially for Women of Color

"It was an impossible choice. You could either do your job well or parent well. I was failing at both, and that's an incredibly heavy feeling. I didn't want to quit my job, but there was no other choice to keep my family afloat."

2x The amount that working mothers are likely to worry, as compared to working fathers, that their performance is being judged negatively because of their caregiving responsibilities.



moms feel

intensely

lonely

The strange and lonely transformation of first-time mothers in the pandemic

Moms in Middle Age: Rarely Alone, Often Online and Increasingly Lonely

"I am surrounded by children, toys, noise & laughter every single day and I've never felt more completely on my own. I had no idea that motherhood would be this devastatingly lonely - everyone talks so much about "the village".

We did a study on loneliness a couple years ago that was quite alarming.

Being lonely is a universal pandemic all on its own.

But during this project, we heard that mothers feel truly alone right now.

They feel like they've lost their village - or what they had of one to begin with.

They feel like they've lost places to go outside of the home.

They feel like there's an immense amount of stress being put on their partnership - or like there's no one to have their back, if they're a single mom.

They feel like they've lost the aspects of themselves outside of the role of mother.

And they feel like the quiet labor that they've always done has become even more unvalidated, unpaid, and unrecognized.



**moms feel
stuck in place
or sent backwards**

Coronavirus and gender: More chores for women set back gains in equality

Pandemic Will 'Take Our Women 10 Years Back' in the Workplace

"I was a chemical engineer and now I'm at home full-time, just trying to figure out how to breastfeed. I love my daughter, but it's hard not to feel like we went right back to the gender roles of the 1940s when society hit a rocky patch."

After years of progress and upward mobility, working mothers feel like their momentum has been put on pause.

Some had to drop out of the workplace altogether.

Some had to take demotions in their career.

Most are struggling to stay future-focused, when they're just trying to get through the mundane struggle of the day-to-day.

They feel like their lives have been put on pause.

Or like they've lost years of progress in the fight for equality, particularly for women of color.

Moms feel like the world is starting to move on, and to "get back to normal".

But that the compromises that they were asked to make are calcifying & starting to feel permanent.

There doesn't seem to be a light at the end of the tunnel.

And it doesn't seem like their governments or their workplaces give a damn about them or about alleviating the structural problems.

& moms feel

a deep, primal,

fiery rage

***These Mothers Were Exhausted, So
They Met on a Field to Scream***

**The Rage Mothers Don't Talk
About**

Mother rage is not "appropriate." Mothers are supposed to be martyr-like in our patience. We are not supposed to want to hit our kids or to tear out our hair. We hide these urges, because we are afraid to be labeled "bad moms." We feel the need to qualify our frustration with "I love my child to the moon and back, but..." As if mother rage equals a lack of love. As if rage has never shared a border with love. Fearing judgment, we say nothing. The rage festers and we are left under a pile of loneliness and debilitating shame.

One of the most interesting things to surface in this project is how deeply angry most mothers are now.

In a role that was once dominated by perfectionism, individual guilt & feelings of personal inadequacy, women are truly enraged.

And they're looking at this as a structural, societal problem – one that's far bigger than anything they can solve on their own.

The floodgates have opened - and mothers are starting to talk about the taboo topics - about the things they're not supposed to say, and the resentments they're not supposed to feel.

They're making their voices heard on how deeply unfair - and impossible - their lives, and the expectations of them feel.

We're at a tipping
point moment. A catalyst
for what comes next for
society.

We've abandoned mothers.

And they've started to
come together, in a really
interesting collective
that transcends
differences - bound
together in an effort for
dignity, fairness &
justice.

A photograph of three people standing on a grassy field at night. They are wearing winter clothing: a white jacket and yellow beanie on the left, a dark coat and blue beanie in the center, and a brown coat and white beanie on the right. A large pink rectangular box is overlaid in the center of the image, containing the text 'HOW TO HELP?'. In the background, a soccer goal is visible on the left, and a building with lit windows is on the right.

HOW TO HELP?



GET REAL

The floodgates are opening, and mothers are looking for outlets for some of their rage & frustration.

How can you create spaces that feel safe to be truly honest about stresses and resentments?

How can you weave true honesty into brand campaigns and messages?

How can you help women find the outlets – and the village – that they've been desperately missing?

How can you alleviate some of the loneliness and isolation mothers are feeling?



show
REALITY

For those in charge of advertising and cultural messaging about moms and for moms - how can you honestly reflect their everyday existences?

This is a topic that's been hidden away for ages.

But it's also a topic that's begging to have some light shone upon it.

Mothers talk about how seeing images of the perfect career woman heading off to the office and then coming home to crush it as a parent perpetuate their feelings that they're not doing a good job.

How can you - as brands and marketers - help open up these conversations and show the realities of what it's actually like to be a working mother right now?



Let's get your
own house
in order

True change tends to happen from the inside out.

And it might be a good time to look at how your company is supporting mothers.

A good time to ask them for what they genuinely need.

A good time to provide more material resources, such as childcare, flexible hours, or not always having to come into the office.

A good time to treat your partners & vendors with the same respect and flexibility that you give to your own employees.

Thank you!

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