

International Journal of Health Science

Acceptance date: 13/01/2025

WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT *MOM-SHAMING*- ESSAY ON THE MATERNAL *MOBBING* TODAY

Eliete Aparecida Teodoro Amaral

Sergio Tavares de Almeida Rego

<http://lattes.cnpq.br/9148689357356217>

Juliana Santos da Silva

<http://lattes.cnpq.br/9113590418357095>

Katherine Kristinne de Oliveira Moraes

<http://lattes.cnpq.br/4078660571715049>

All content in this magazine is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License. Attribution-Non-Commercial-Non-Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).



Abstract: Being a mother can be a dream, a goal or something to be avoided for many people around the world. Being a mother can be a dream, a goal or something to be avoided for many people around the world. However, by becoming an integral part of the maternal world, you also become an integral part of a “society” that begins to demand of you exemplary attitudes, exacting standards that you can’t always reach. So I wanted to write about maternal *mobbing*, the hardships experienced by new mothers in a society that demands perfection and profits from imperfection, in the light of the book *Sobre Nós* by Maria Clara Dias. **Keywords:** mom-shaming; motherhood; bullying; harassment.

INTRODUCTION

“Motherhood isn’t always a bed of roses”
Author unknown

Becoming a mother can be a dream, a goal or something to be avoided for many people around the world.

We live well, in harmony, until the moment we innocently give in to the first whim of what life in society demands of us: to form emotional bonds.

We live well, until the seeds we plant when we form these bonds form part of the second desire that the notorious society demands: to flourish and bear fruit.

And so we arrive at the dream, the goal, something that should have been avoided - and wasn’t.

There are women who enjoy a motherhood represented as a scenario where the characters have been carefully chosen for a classic family composition, traditionally portrayed from the earliest times. In a functional way, the roles of father, mother, siblings, grandparents, uncles (...) are well played, forming a support network¹ under which a new mother is sculpted to adapt to the new being that arrives in the world, also adapting.

However, there are women who, under adverse circumstances, experience another side: the *loneliness* of solo motherhood, whether desired or not, the absence of a support network, financial deprivation, among other particularities.

In a study on the functionality of women who do not have a support network, it was observed that the absence of a support network represents a greater degree of exhaustion, insecurity in caring for the baby and, consequently, in child development.²

However, as she becomes an integral part of the maternal world, she also becomes an integral part of a “society” that begins to demand exemplary attitudes from her, exacting standards that she can’t always reach.

Tips, advice, hunches, all kinds of parallel information from any and all sources are dumped on the new mother in an attempt to mold her into the pre-established customs of the society she is now part of. Criticism, negative judgments dressed up as positive attitudes are particularly directed at the new participants in a scenario in which they displease, conflict or at least oppose some point of view adopted by the older members.

The term *mom-shaming* refers to this type of conduct: the moral embarrassment suffered by mothers in their motherhood, commonly caused by other women, be they other mothers, grandmothers, friends, neighbors (...) and their opinions that contribute to the depreciation of the new mother.³

This behavior, whether or not it is orchestrated, in which a group moves to attack an outsider in order to protect everyone who belongs to it, is called *mobbing*.⁴

It made me want to write about maternal *mobbing*, which I experienced when I joined the maternal community after the birth my first daughter.

While I understood myself as a woman-mother, a solo woman, a solo mother and responsible for a life that depended on me for absolutely everything in order to survive, I was harassed in homeopathic doses by my peers, feeling more and more inadequate every day in my daily attempts to be a good mother.

I would then like to discuss the moral basis of maternal *mobbing* behavior.

The aim is to reflect, from the perspective of the book *Sobre Nós - Expandindo as fronteiras da moralidade*, by Maria Clara Dias, on the elements involved in the process of *mom-shaming*, from the concept of ideal motherhood to the real motherhood experienced by women who play multiple roles in our society.

MOM-SHAMING: CHARACTERISTICS OF A VEILED MORAL DISCOURSE

A part of motherhood is experienced in its prodromes as early as the discovery of pregnancy.

Already at this stage, there is an internal conflict over whether to tell people about the pregnancy. To tell or not to tell? Now or later? Who should know?

We owe a lot of these thoughts to customs, beliefs passed down from generation to generation and, how can we not mention, the large-scale dissemination of these beliefs provided by the exacerbated use of social media.

According to Dias⁵, the main characteristic of moral discourse is its claim to universal validity. That is, a moral peculiarity common to all members of any society.

The moral discourse on motherhood takes on multiple facets and comes from multiple sources and seems to be applicable to each and every mother, be it her their own characteristics in their mothering, whether these are the characteristics of their children or the environment in which they live.

They are rules of conduct of a prescriptive nature, they set out a truth or many that often contradict each other, namely: from the discovery of the pregnancy until the twelfth week of gestation it must take place in secrecy, implying harm to the fetus and the pregnant woman if it is not complied with.

However, medicine has indeed clarified the fragility of a conceptus in its early stages of development. However, the particularities of female physiology in a pregnancy may correspond to a greater risk for some women, and less for others. There are pregnancies that remain under a cautious eye until their final moments.

In short, the custom described here portrays an ancient, widespread belief that has not been subjected to technical-scientific proof, often referring its motivation to higher beings, which it is up to the mother to believe in or not.

Undoubtedly, whether or not to follow this custom will be at the discretion of the pregnant woman, but failure to do so could lead to the first unpleasantness of the maternal experience: public disapproval of her attitude in announcing a pregnancy in its early stages.

Subsequently, as the pregnancy unfolds, new prescriptions emerge for conduct compatible with maternal society, such as a name, a trousseau, how to dress and how to plan for the arrival of the new family member.

A pregnant woman should smile. She should be happy for the life she is giving birth to. She should put her hand on her belly when taking photos. She should avoid...

Tal Dias,

In all societies there are behaviors that obey a pattern directly or indirectly inherited by tradition (...) There are no laws in the legal system that require compliance, nor legal punishments for those who break them. There is, however, an expectation on the part of the social body that adult individuals, i.e. those who have been properly socialized, will, under normal conditions, live up to them.

The dissemination of content through social media expands the range information and reaffirms the prescriptive nature of a moral discourse, directing maternal content about how to act in different situations, such as the right way to raise their children, how to act and how they should act.

Today, in the midst of the Digital Age, there are professionals from various fields, both educated and renowned, who use scientific bases that are often linked to a spiritual/religious bias to justify the moral judgments they are disseminating.

MATERNAL MORALITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE: THE HUMANIZATION OF SUFFERING

The term “morality” can be expressed as a set of rules/principles that guide an individual’s social life in relation to the community.⁵

The concept “morality” can connote a conservative stance in which good customs prevail over adverse behavior.

Morality and good morals are that are safeguarded in Brazilian legislation, highlighting their importance for the well-being of the Brazilian people.⁶ In a study on the proposed law on the maternal right to anonymous childbirth, Fonseca⁷ criticizes the bill that aims to allow pregnant women to be anonymous at the time of childbirth, for various reasons. However, the author moves her discourse largely in such a way as to correlate this right with a negative outcome in a future in which children are deprived of information about their origins.

It is noteworthy that the term “maternal morality” refers to family conservatism, in a context in which the woman who is part of it seeks to maintain her *status* in society.

Nevertheless, the term humanization has been linked to human processes in general, especially in maternity, from conception through childbirth and the puerperium, in a position that is antagonistic to the technocratic model, in which positive human processes are based

on science, the use of technology, patriarchal views and the capitalist economic context.⁸ However, a study on the paradox of humanization in a maternity hospital in the south of Brazil raised crucial questions about the employability of the universalization of the precepts of humanization in the human cycle.

Pregnancy and childbirth: maternal particularities in this regard differ according to the context in which they live.⁹

In view of this, we return to Dias’ study⁵ on the perspectives of what is (or should be) fair and the meaning of what is good, for each being who experiences motherhood.

Peter Singer, in *Ethical Life*¹⁰ discusses the maximization of well-being for the benefit of a fairer society and that, commonly, there will be an overlapping of some general interest to the detriment of a personal interest, again for the benefit of the community

Often, however, a commitment to a more ethical way of life will be the first step in a gradual but far-reaching evolution in your lifestyle and your perception of your own place in the world. You will endorse new causes and see your goals change. If you are involved in your work, you will find it less important to have money and social position. Seen from a new perspective, the world will look different (...)

The process of humanization in the health area as a whole brings with it the proposal to break with the biomedical and technocentric paradigm, the medicalization of life, capitalist supremacy, among other factors.

However, would such a break-up be in the general interest?

Is it assumed that the principles of justice and fairness are equally conceived in a society with similar characteristics?

In his theory of justice, Rawls explains this as a well-ordered society, in which individuals have a high degree of enlightenment and equally accept decisions on behalf of a rational community?

The free choice of birth and breastfeeding - this study does not need to discuss the undeniable benefits of giving birth vaginally or the importance of breast milk in the early stages of life - are recurring themes with massive digital content.

Maternal narratives have been gaining ground as identity characteristics bring together or repel similar or discordant experiences, respectively.

But in this medium of easy dissemination of ideas, it can also be a source of suffering from the point at which a dissenting point is accepted as truth by a greater number of people.

Mariana Bahia, an obstetric nurse, reflected on the role of social networks in maternal illness: ideal profiles of maternal attitudes, ideal upbringing and development of children, ideal situations, ideal society.¹¹

When we spoke earlier about humanization at the level of health policy, we then questioned whether this process would encompass general anxieties, given that the notions of what is good and fair are not exhausted by just one meaning in our society.

Bahia also reflects on what she calls the maternity industry. He emphasizes the large number of women who, in the midst of multiple vulnerabilities, appeal to a way of giving birth, a technique for breastfeeding, a technique for extending baby's sleep through the night. What's more: courses on how to introduce food, all kinds of technology, whether soft or hard, in order to soften or eliminate the difficulties that the maternal experience can bring.

And in the face of this, of a failure in the technique or technological apparatus, the maternal suffering is similar to the failure to realize that her mothering is unique, and that perhaps she doesn't fit into the same clothes that are sold in this digital age.

MATERNAL SHAME: GROUP REACTION

Mothers aren't enjoying their children and expect something from babies that they aren't even ready to give.

Mariana Bahia on her social network, 2023.

The overexposure of certain groups in society in their daily lives can bring with it implicit conceptions of good living, achieved by: adopting a predetermined posture, acquiring a consumer good or service.

Contrary to this standard can constitute a breach of a social contract, even if it is unconsciously generated.

We accept the terms of this contract as we enter social networks, we foster the system by seeking social approval by exposing our tastes in food, our clothes, our thoughts and our loves to others.

Conversely, the disapproval of these elements can generate a potentially fatal reaction in the so-called "culture of cancellation" that we live in today.

The culture of cancellation is a progressive reaction to a fact, opinion or action by an individual that is rejected by a growing number of other individuals.

Social scientist Diogo Soares explains that this type of demonstration touches on political and ideological issues, is dressed up as a protection of society's good customs, but is ultimately about individualized opinions.

The maternal experience itself is instilled with myths and truths (which are often popular knowledge passed down from generation to generation). And for every maternal situation, there is a group of spectators who resemble an audience in an interactive movie from the Black Mirror franchise. Each action can easily be guided by a different and indisputably "infallible" opinion.

In all these situations, we must emphasize the prescriptive nature of the moral behaviors thrown at the maternal world, the claim to

universal validity of countless manuals that aspire to teach the *bê-á-bá* of good mothering. The claim to validity of these behaviors, which often don't undergo scientific scrutiny as to what is true or false. While truth, in the absence of the confluence of inner knowledge with the world we experience, if there is no adequacy, there is no truth.¹¹

The role of the internet in disseminating the prescription of good living, good mothering and *mom-shaming* leads us to question its link to the mental illness of mothers.

Mothers who dreamed of being mothers. Mothers who later decided to be mothers. Mothers who perhaps didn't want to be mothers, but just are.

Motherhood, although for some it is a bed of roses, carries with it all the thorns.

A woman can only be a woman until she becomes a mother. After that, she is usually, at first, a mother. Already in this reflection I can exemplify the moral burden attributed to the maternal experience. We need to talk about maternal expectations. We need to talk about the expectations placed on maternal expectations.

We need to talk.

REFERENCES

- 1- Rapoport A, Piccinini CA. Apoio social e experiência da maternidade. J Hum Growth Dev. 2006; 16 (1): 85-96.
- 2- Alves AB et al. Funcionalidade na perspectiva das redes de apoio no puerpério. Rev. Bras. Saude Mater. Infant. 22 (3) • Jul- Sep 2022 • <https://doi.org/10.1590/1806-9304202200030013>
- 3- Dias C.B. Mom-shaming: quando a nova mãe precisa lidar com as críticas dentro da família. [WEB] Disponível em: <https://www.semprefamilia.com.br/defesa-da-vida/mom-shaming-quando-a-nova-mae-precisa-lidar-com-as-criticas-dentro-da-familia/>
- 4- Souza, J.G. Pohl, H.H. Ribeiro, D.A. · Mobbing as a source of psychological harm in workers. Rev Bras Med Trab. 2023 Feb 13;20(4):670-675. doi: 10.47626/1679-4435-2022-766. eCollection 2022 Oct-Dec.
- 5- Dias MC. Sobre Nós – Expandindo as fronteiras da moralidade. 2 ed. Rio de Janeiro: Pirilampo, 2016.
- 6- Ralph, J. A importância da moral e dos bons costumes na legislação. [WEB] <https://www.jusbrasil.com.br/artigos/a-importancia-da-moral-e-dos-bons-costumes-na-legislacao/443708502>
- 7- Fonseca, C. Abandono, adoção e anonimato: questões de moralidade materna suscitadas pelas propostas legais de “parto anônimo”. Sexualidad, Salud y Sociedad - Revista Latinoamericana, núm. 1, 2009, pp. 30-62 Centro Latino-Americano em Sexualidade e Direitos Humanos Rio de Janeiro, Brasil
- 8- Bourguignon, A.M. A humanização do parto e nascimento no Brasil nas trajetórias de suas pesquisadoras. Hist. cienc. saude-Manguinhos 27 (2) • Apr-Jun 2020 • <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-59702020000200010>.
- 9- Tornquist CS. Paradoxos da humanização em uma maternidade no Brasil. Cad. Saúde Pública 19 (suppl 2) • 2003 • <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-311X2003000800023>
- 10- Singer, P. Vida Ética: os melhores ensaios do mais polêmico filósofo da atualidade. Rio de Janeiro: Ediouro, 2002.
- 11- Vargas, S.S.L. O problema da verdade em Kant. Revista de Filosofia v.12, n.2, dezembro/2015. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31977/grirfi.v12i2.670>