

Zulily

THE STATE OF MOTHERHOOD

REPORT

THE EVOLUTION AND CELEBRATION OF THOSE WHO WEAR THE MOM MANTLE



INTRODUCTION

Under rapidly changing times, the 85 million moms that make up the U.S. population are coveted drivers of the economy. Universally, however, they're under a lot of pressure, compounded by three factors, including:

- Mental tax of to-do lists
- Requirement to maximize budgets for a declining middle America household income, further strained by record-high inflation (6.4% as of January 2023)
- General increase of societal pressures

To further understand the compounding pressures on moms, Zulily conducted a survey of 1,200 parents from across the country to examine the state of motherhood post-pandemic.

The research revealed that the evolution of the concept of a mother has accelerated because of macro-environmental factors and attitudinal shifts in parenting. As a result, the definition of a mother has changed.

Mother has transitioned from a noun (a person) to a verb (an act), specifically describing the act of mothering.

As an online retailer committed to delivering a fun shopping experience, without breaking the bank, for moms everywhere, Zulily seeks to understand everyone who wears the mom mantle and plays a role in mothering. The State of Motherhood Report explores all the different types of moms, traditional and non-traditional, in addition to their motivations and behaviors.

MOM'S UNIVERSAL TRUTH: THE PRESSURE IS ALWAYS ON

There's a universal truth for moms: they're fatigued by compounding pressures, whether it's time, financial, or societal.

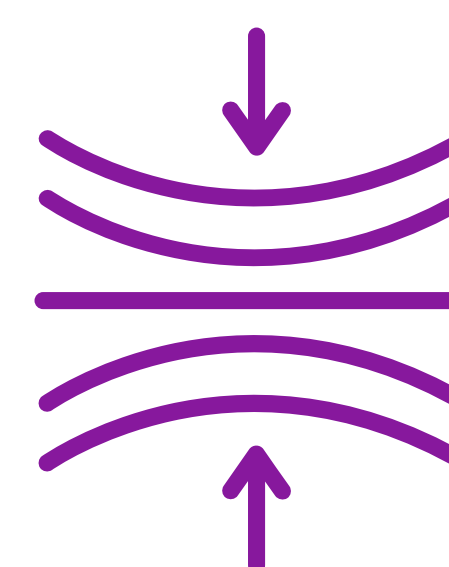


In fact, 84% of moms believe the stereotype of the perfect mom is an outdated standard, but 9 of 10 still feel pressure to be perfect.¹

- 77% feel pressure to be an involved parent
- 71% feel pressure to be physically active
- 68% feel pressure to be successful in their job and career
- 76% feel pressure to support their family financially

The pressure to be as perfect as a superhero has been exacerbated and unprecedented during unconventional times, such as a multi-year pandemic, where moms wore many hats and juggled new responsibilities that placed even more pressure on them, including:

- Bulk of childcare
- Household chores
- Managing household finances
- Scheduling children's activities



¹Source: The Pew Foundation. "The pandemic has highlighted many challenges for mothers, but they aren't necessarily new" (2021).

THE NEW MODERN FAMILY: REDEFINING WHO MOM IS

When the iconic and heartwarming TV series "Modern Family" debuted in 2009, it was a zeitgeist moment that provided humor and levity and spoke to the rapidly evolving family unit – moving beyond the idea of a more traditional nuclear family, which represents fewer than half of families in the U.S. New norms around the concept of mothering were seen and heard, from the adoption journey of a same-sex couple to the blending of a stepfamily – it brought to light all the universal truths of parenting and the various pressures.



Moms are at the heart of modernization of family composition, as roles and responsibilities are dynamic and rapidly evolving. Household caring, for instance, has increased multi-generationally since the 1970s, with median household income declining for the first time since 2011, and record-high inflation in 2022.

Traditional family make up has also changed. Today, fewer than half of kids in the U.S. live in a “traditional” family, defined as living in a home with two married heterosexual parents in their first marriage². Now, 63.2 million households with children under 18 consist of two parents in remarriage (15%), cohabiting parents (7%), or single parent households (26%)³.

Thus, it’s no surprise that the share of multi-generational households has grown steadily in the U.S. since the 1970s – a trend that is reflected in the adage “it takes a village.”

So, while the pressure on moms remains unchanged, at best, what has changed over the past few decades is the composition of family households and the concept of a mother – and America agrees.

Forty-one million parents (65%) in the U.S. agree that the concept of a mother has changed in the past 10 years⁴. Now, a mother is defined as anyone who wears the mom mantle and cares for the children in their lives – the role is not restricted to giving birth.



This is indicated by 86% of parents who say a “motherer” is a person who has a substantial role in bringing up a child with care and affection.

MOTHER MOVES FROM NOUN TO VERB: “MOTHER” TO “MOTHERING”

Today, one-third of U.S. adults in multigenerational households say caregiving is a major reason for their living arrangement⁵, which is not surprising given the number of hats moms wear on any given day – from mother, teacher, doctor, chef, coach, and decorator, to artist, technician, breadwinner and more.



² Source: Pew Research, “Fewer than half of U.S. kids today live in a ‘traditional’ family” (2015).

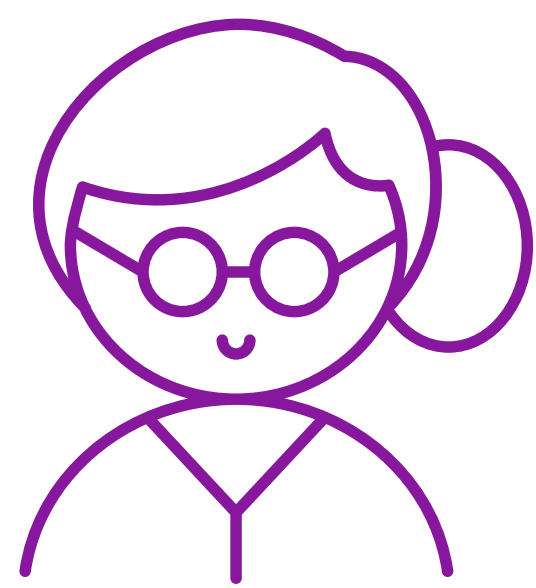
³ Source: Pew Research, “Parenting in America” (2015).

⁴ Source: The U.S. Census Bureau, “Census Bureau Releases New Estimates on America’s Families and Living Arrangements” (2020).

⁵ Source: Pew Research, “Financial Issues Top the List of Reasons U.S. Adults Live in Multigenerational Homes (2022).

Who Wears the Mom Mantle?

As responsibilities and pressures on moms expanded during the pandemic, so did the definition of mothering. As the mantle broadened, Zulily explored the different types of moms that make up the mom mantle to see who ranks the highest in sharing the responsibilities of caregiving and attention to raising children.



For single moms, mother knows best. Their mom, followed by grandma, ranked highest in helping to wear the mom mantle. Single moms also turn to their sister and their best friend.

Interestingly, for moms in relationships, the top 5 people who wear the mom mantle include, in rank order, their mom, wife, sister, grandma, and husband – an indication that female familial bonds are especially important when it comes to child caregiving.

For dads, if in a relationship, their wife is their number one mom, followed by their mom, sister, grandma, and husband.

How Moms and Dads View their Jobs

- For women, whether single or in a relationship, their primary three hats are all about nurturing: mother first, teacher second, and chef third.
- For dads, the primary hats self-identified as teaching comes first, acting as a mom second and coach, third.

During the pandemic, the need for a more utilitarian technician became critical. With work, school, extra-curriculars, and more shifting to unconventional arrangements (at-home, hybrid, and every mode in between), screen time was essential.

Now, settled into a new norm, dads continue to play the role of technician in their family, ranking it within their top 5 hats worn, in comparison to moms, where technician ranks last.

With each hat comes different pressures and the need to rely on others to support the many and varied aspects of mothering.

SINGLE PARENTHOOD IS BECOMING MORE COMMON

Nearly 24 million children (33%) are living in a single parent household, and within that, 15 million children live in mother-only households⁶ – a number that has been increasing for the past several decades.

While all parents face economic and time pressures, single mothers are uniquely challenged as they are the sole breadwinners and wear every hat; they cannot “divide and conquer” as easily as their coupled counterparts.

Single or in a relationship, women are the leading drivers of middle-class income, accounting for 91% of the total income gain for their families⁷.

⁷ Source: Brookings Institute, “Women’s work boosts middle class incomes but creates a family time squeeze that needs to be eased” (2020).

⁶ Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, “Child Well-Being in Single-Parent Families” (2022).

However, pay is not equitable. In 2020, women earned 84% of what men earned, which means there are now more financial pressures than ever for middle class moms.

A declining middle class now only represents 50% of households as compared to 61% in 1971 – down 11%.

With more than 23.5 million working moms⁸ in the U.S., contributions to household budgets to caretake for their family is always at tension with time demands, evidenced by 79% of moms who frequently wish they had more time to spend with family.

Feeling the Budget Pinch More than Ever

Single moms are hit hardest when it comes to financial pressures, since they are often required to support a household while making a lower average income compared to dual-income parents. In 2020, the median household income for single moms was \$51,168, which is well below the median for married couples (\$106,921).

Rising housing and childcare costs are just two of the major factors that are requiring moms to maximize savings. Now, the majority (92%) of moms say that inflation on essentials like groceries, fuel, etc. has impacted their everyday household spending, with financial tradeoffs and essentials being most impacted (72% groceries, gas, etc.) even greater need to cut costs where possible.



Thirty-seven percent (37%) of single moms have reduced their discretionary spend by more than 50% and worry about common financial stressors, including:

- Paying bills (39%)
- Inflation and rising costs of goods and services (27%)
- Saving for the future (19%)
- Balancing necessities with discretionary spending (9%)
- Job security (5%)

Though all parents face these challenges, as the primary provider for their families, single mothers may face them more acutely.

“MOM” IS NOT DEFINED BY GENDER

For nearly 40% of parents, gender does not define a mother, challenging traditional law, which defines a mother as a woman who has borne a child or a female parent⁹.



Regardless of how one identifies within their relational life (e.g., heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, married, single, etc.), only 40% of parents today would define a mother as “a woman who has given birth to a child.” Between 2 million and 3.7 million children under age 18 have an LGBTQ parent, and approximately 200,000 of them are being raised by a same-sex couple. Many of these children are being raised by a single LGBTQ parent or by a different-sex couple where one parent is bisexual¹⁰.

⁸ Source: The U.S. Census Bureau, “The Choices Working Mothers Make” (2020).

⁹ Source: The Law Dictionary, “MOTHER Definition & Legal Meaning”.

¹⁰ Source: The U.S. Census Bureau, “LGBTQ Family Fact Sheet” (2017).

When 1,200 parents were asked, “Does gender define a mother?,” those that said, “Yes, gender does define a mother” varied, most dramatically from moms in a relationship compared to single mom. This further reiterates that the definition of a mother is evolving to extend beyond traditional gender norms:

- 74% of moms in a relationship said “Yes”
- 69% of dads said “Yes”
- 67% of LGBTQ parents said “Yes”
- 53% of single moms said “Yes”

Shift in Gender Roles in Parenting

In addition to multi-generational living, other societal trends, specifically attitudinal trends toward parenting, are impacting the evolution of the definition of a mom from a noun to a verb, “motherer.”

As women begin to close the income gap and – in some cases – out-earn their male partners, the childcare decisions driven by finances are decreasingly being informed by social norms – “moms do this, dads do that” – and instead are becoming a more fluid.



This is evidenced by the fact that there are an estimated 2.1 million stay-at-home dads, an increase of 8% since 1989¹¹.

The act of mothering is now shared with dads, too. Whether co-parenting, single, or in a relationship, many of the 74.7 million dads in the U.S¹². wear the mom mantle. As such, dads recognize the unique role of mothering, when they wear that hat, and some of the pressures moms face.

Dads also see fluidity in the role of mothering, with 86% of dads agreeing that a “motherer” is a person who has a substantial role in bringing up a child with care and affection. When looking for the mom mantle outside of the family unit, dads turn to their moms (57%) and sisters (32%) for support and flex their hats to play teacher (51%), coach (36%), and yes, 39% play the role of mother.

This is a function of the financial pressures parents face as they address rising childcare costs and as mothers increasingly become the breadwinners of their families.

HOME ECONOMICS 2023

For moms, the stress of being the primary caretaker is compounded by increased financial responsibility, especially in an uncertain world. Historically, men have been the household breadwinner. But as the evolution of the mother has shifted, so has the responsibility of holding the purse strings. Dual-household incomes have risen, women have entered the workforce with more college and advanced degrees, outpacing men, and women are out-earning their male partners as a result.

¹¹ Source: Forbes, “The Rise of the Stay at Home Date” (2022).

¹² Source: U.S. Census Bureau, “Census Bureau Releases First Ever Report on Men’s Fertility” (2022).

More Moms are Primary Breadwinners

Of single moms, not surprisingly, 78% are the primary breadwinner for their family, receiving financial support from others, such as ex-husband/wife (9%), parents (6%), or unmarried partner (8%). Counter to the financial growth over time by women and their contributions to household income, of dads surveyed, 87% reported they are the breadwinner for the family, as compared to the 55% of moms in a relationship.

Distinctively, who earns the primary household income versus who manages the budget varies. Eighty percent of single moms are responsible for their household budget, whereas 37% of dads attribute moms as responsible for managing the household budget, even though 87% of dads are the primary earners. At the same time, 69% of dads report making 75-100% of purchasing decisions in a year.

Although more than half of moms in a relationship are the primary breadwinner, 75% believe moms are responsible for managing the household budget and nearly 20% claim to make 100% of all purchasing decisions in a year.

Saving More, Spending Less (or Spending More Carefully)

With inflation at 6.4%, maximizing budgets and finding savings is critical to family caretaking. Interestingly, 49% of dads and 48% of moms in a relationship have decreased discretionary spend by 25%, compared to single moms (38%).

Thirteen percent of dads have decreased discretionary spend by 75%, which is 8% more compared to moms in a relationship decreasing 75% of discretionary spend by 5%. This could be because dads' concerns for inflation and saving for the future are two of the top financial pressures.



Regardless of their marital status, parents face continued financial pressures on all sides, making saving even more crucial.

MOM GUILT CONTINUES, DADS FEEL IT TOO

Despite incredible loads on moms' shoulders across parenting, finances and time constraints, mom guilt is as commonplace as ever, unfortunately, and no longer a phenomenon exclusive to women, but likely an increasing trend among dads as they wear the mom mantle more.

Mom guilt may be defined in different ways, but 40% agree that mom guilt is most closely defined as “trying to get everything right.”

All parents surveyed, including single moms, moms in a relationship, LGBTQ parents, also define “mom guilt” as constantly worrying about making a mistake; interestingly, 26% of dads define mom guilt as “unrealistic ideal of a perfect mom.”

The number one pressure across all groups – same-sex parents, single moms, couple moms and dads – is trying to do everything on a to-do list. In fact, it plagues all those who wear the mom mantle, with all surveyed unanimously ranking it as the top pressure. Reducing the to-do list is a common goal.

TIME IS LIFE'S MOST PRECIOUS COMMODITY: TIME WITH YOUR KIDS

Those who play the mother role know that time is life's most precious commodity. In a 24-hour day, time is dedicated to wearing many hats – mother, teacher, chef – and now, eight hours is spent breadwinning, which leaves less time to spend with children.

How much time parents spend with their child/ren while awake varied across 1,200 parents:

- 30% spend more than 7 hours
- 32% spend 5-6 hours
- 24% spend 3-4 hours
- 14% spend 1-2 hours

The increase in stay-at-home dads and dual income, co-parenting and the attitudinal trend among gender roles and parenting is showing up in the evolution of the mom mantle and in awake time spent with their child/ren.



35%

More than 1/3 of dads (35%) spend 5-6 awake hours with their child/ren.

Despite shared childrearing resources, nearly half (48%) of single moms report spending 7 or more hours a day during kids' awake time.



48%

The awake time spent with children also correlates to how it makes those who wear the mom mantle feel.

- 88% of parents feel good about spending at least 3 awake hours per day with their children.
- 60% of parents feel good about spending more than 5 hours per day.

This demonstrates that intentional time is nurturing for their kids as much as it is about feeling good.

What Defines Quality Time for Parents Might Surprise You

Intentional quality time (spending meaningful time together) is key and can come in all shapes and sizes.

Commonly, there's a prioritization of quality time at mealtime; when sharing in new adventures and experiences together; when taking an interest and being involved in extracurriculars; when bringing together friends and family to be involved and close; when creating cozy places at home to cuddle and nest; when finding ways to explore the creative side together; and more.

- The ritual of the family table and spending quality time during daily meals ranked the highest across 1,200 parents who were asked where they are most intentional about spending quality time spent with their kids.
- This rang true for moms in a relationship and LGBTQ parents, as well.
- But for single moms, intentional time is prioritized by sharing a new adventure, whereas the ritual of the family table ranked last.
- For dads, 26% said taking an interest and being involved in their kids' extracurriculars was the top intended way to spend quality time, which is why "coach" ranked in dads' top 3 hats.

ZULILY CELEBRATES ALL THOSE WHO WEAR THE MOM MANTLE THIS MOTHER'S DAY

U.S. consumers spent \$37.1 billion celebrating moms in 2022, with 84% celebrating Mother's Day. With so many individuals sharing the role of mothering by providing support and care for children, regardless of gender or familial relationship, Mother's Day deserves a broader definition, too.

Zulily is taking action to ensure all types of moms and motherly figures are recognized and celebrated this year by launching For All Moms Gifting Advisor – a first-of-its-kind text service from Zulily designed to help shoppers find the perfect gift for all those who wear the mom mantle, whether that be biological or stepparents, sisters, grandparents, dads, or even themselves.

Zulily's For All Moms Gifting Advisor was launched in partnership with celebrity actress and mom of two Busy Philipps, who has learned how to co-parent with another adult who is equally as invested in her two children. As more and more families are veering away from traditional family structures and customizing parenting approaches, both Zulily and Busy recognize that there are many types of moms and mom-like figures who care for us all who deserve to be celebrated this Mother's Day and every day.



Visit [The Find by Zulily](#) for gift ideas for moms for Mother's Day and beyond.

METHODOLOGY

Findings are based on a Pollfish survey of over 1,200 U.S. based parents above the ages of 25, with children in the household. The survey was fielded in January 2023.