

## Feel Stressed? Feel Shame?

Written by Jenni Person, BT Contributor  
September 2017

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### Instead of taking the edge off, let's look for solutions



*other needs something today to calm her down / And though she's not really ill / There's a little yellow pill / She goes running for the shelter of a mother's little helper / And it helps her on her way, gets her through her busy day.* -- "Mother's Little Helper," Rolling Stones, 1966.

I recently caught a story on the *Today Show* featuring special guest celebrity reporter Maria Shriver in a segment about how mothers are smoking pot in their homes and together at playdates.

While centering on the voices of the moms embracing weed, the story was shrouded in the shame and self-righteousness of a puritanical lens. Instead of exploring what happens when the generation raised by pot-smoking parents of the Sixties and Seventies become parents themselves, it was reminiscent of the "Just Say No" Eighties. But more significant, it was yet another media-blasted shaming of mothers.

The tone of the story was that this was "shocking" news about questionable behavior. More parents, the story's data claimed, use weed than their teen-age kids do. The mothers interviewed were defensive and spoke of how both they and their children had been ostracized by other mothers. One reported that her child's friend had been forbidden to play with her child.

"Smoking is inherently unhealthy," Larissa Mooney, M.D., of UCLA Medical Center, told Shriver. As a chronic asthmatic who of course experimented with polluting my lungs as an adolescent (when my asthma was at its worst), I agree that this is absolutely true.

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“By sending the message that we’re smoking something to take the edge off or to cope with pain, that sends a message to our children,” continued Mooney. I agree with the idea that it’s problematic to point kids toward self-medication, potentially suggesting that one’s ills can be alleviated by a dosage, rather than by addressing the root cause.

But why is this only being applied to pot, when alcohol has been glorified in the media forever as a stress reliever for mothers?

As anyone on social media can attest, memes aligning mom-hood with giant glasses of wine and cocktails are rampant, as are references to child-induced drinking. It’s not uncommon for the media to portray elegant, unfettered moms at daytime playdates smiling and laughing over long-stemmed goblets of glittering wine or at bars together on “moms’ night out,” clinking cocktail glasses. It’s all fun and games.

But the images in Shriver’s story didn’t feature gleaming Baccarat crystal bongos in the manicured hands of giggling hipster moms. And it didn’t touch on other forms of consuming cannabis; no swanky platters of enchanted cookies or other edibles, no fancy vape pipes.

The marijuana moms passed a joint in the yard and talked about their pot use as if they had to justify it. Most of them referred to their use in medical terms. They talked about needing to alleviate the physical pain of muscle soreness or the emotional pain of being stifled and overwhelmed by stress. They talked about the herbal remedy making them more productive.

One mother explained that migraine medications made her “foggy” and lethargic, not a good state for tending children. Cannabis was her saving grace for managing both her migraines and her parenting responsibilities. She talked about how she keeps her weed out of reach of her kids, demonstrating the high cabinet where she stores her stash above her built-in microwave. “And the kids know not to touch Mommy’s medicine,” she reassured the camera.

But when that same migraine mom was trying rounds of prescribed painkillers, was anyone doing a news story about it? Likewise, is anyone doing news stories about all the mothers on antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications?

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Yet when referring to her own generation, Shriver stated, “We only had wine...and Vicodin.”

Meanwhile, with a national prescription pill crisis on our hands and sensationalized alcohol legally destroying families, this coverage closed with statistics about marijuana being more addictive than alcohol. Or perhaps I should say, with a national gender inequity crisis on our hands and sensationalized misogyny and patriarchy stifling and destroying lives, this coverage closed with statistics about how moms suck.

Ultimately, it all really seemed like another opportunity to bash moms.

The best scenario would be for Mom not to need pills or wine or cocktails or weed to “help her on her way, get her through her busy day.” Instead of judging her for the stress of being a mom-- much of which is caused by exactly this kind of criticism -- alleviate the causes.

One way I can think of accomplishing this is to abolish the patriarchy and make our culture’s infrastructures relevant to women and mothers and families. Disrupt, rethink, and reframe our culture to be relevant to the 50 percent of the population that was not at the table when these paradigms were defined.

Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

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