

‘Am I being unreasonable to feel outraged?’ Navigating felt inequality in domestic settings on the UK parenting site Mumsnet



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Contemporary feeling rules of femininity: The happy, balanced working parent

- Dominant cultural expectation to balance work and home life – being ‘good mothers’ and successful workers
 - Women as part of the workforce, yet unequal distribution of reproductive labour remains
 - New ‘balanced woman’ ideal – emphasis on positive affect: individual happiness, positivity and well-roundedness (Adamson, 2016; Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008; Rottenberg, 2018)
 - Set of affective and psychic dispositions required in gendered neoliberalism; disavowal of inequalities and incitement to optimistically focus on individualistic ‘solutions’ to achieve more equal gender relations (Gill, 2017; Gill and Orgad, 2017; McRobbie, 2015; Scharff, 2016)
 - Positive, depoliticised affect denotes the contemporary feeling rules of femininity
- Does, and if so, to what extent does Mumsnet offer a platform for the articulation of feelings that go beyond dominant sociocultural expectations?

The affective fabric and cultural significance of mumsnet

Popularity: UK's largest parenting network, with over 12 million visitors per month

Distinctiveness: 'a very large, very opinionated and very wise crowd, (...) an educated audience' (Roberts 2017)

Interactional style: 'combustible commentary' (Thomson et al. 2011); 'affective antagonism' (Jensen 2018); 'robust use of language' (Pedersen and Smithson 2013)

AIBU: Am I Being Unreasonable; most popular sub-forum; barometer for feelings

Data and approach

- February – June 2018: Ethnographic observation of member activities on Mumsnet's online forum
- 10 online discussion threads on the AIBU talk board with 961 posts in total
- Interviews with UK-based website users (n=30)
- Affective-discursive framework paying attention to affective and interpretative repertoires and patterns (Potter and Wetherell, 1988; Wetherell, 2012; 2015)



Thread title	Date	Post
aibu - mental load on maternity leave	10-13 April 2018	35
AIBU to be annoyed that DH never puts family first?	7-11 March 2018	128
AIBU to think that judging by AIBU, 80% of society (women...?) is made up of gumption-less, unassertive wet blankets?	23-24 April 2018	61
Aibu to wish he'd stop moaning?	4 March 2018	57
Are men wired differently or is this a BS excuse	10 April 2018	142
DH and the housework - what do you do?	8-10 April 2018	48
How much can I expect DH to do?	22-23 April 2018	53
Is it possible to have a proper conversation about work and being a mum?	9-13 February 2018	114
To say "ENOUGH!"	16-17 April 2018	131
To want a wife?	10-12 June 2018	192



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Talk » AIBU?

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Subject	Replies	Latest
➡ Start a new thread within this topic	-	-
To wonder if anyone has ever won anything on mumsnet?	49	Middledistancerunner 22/04/19 17:57
Divorcing seriously ill wife	40	BigFatLiar 22/04/19 17:57
To ask for help quick?!	12	boilersontheblink 22/04/19 17:57
To be pissed off with the school and wonder where I go from here.	84	bringbacksideburns 22/04/19 17:57
to think the extreme school attendance pressure makes more illnesses go round.	2	Ewitsahooman 22/04/19 17:57
To not know how to use the gym?	8	seesawteddy 22/04/19 17:57
AIBU not to give my mum a special 'role' in my wedding?	77	Mrsjaye 22/04/19 17:57
To ask you about dentures	6	zukeicat

Trending Talk

To just refuse the wedding invitation
Divorcing seriously ill wife
In thinking DD is too young to give...
To wonder what the hell is going on...
BIL fucked the garden up

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A barometer for feelings

I thought I would test the water with you good people to confirm that I am not, in fact, going bonkers, and that my standpoint is reasonable!

(OP of AIBU to be annoyed that DH never puts family first?)

I've been on here with an aibu of something seemingly easy to fix, with a bit of boat rocking and communication. I needed the nerve and to be validated if you like.

(response on AIBU to think that judging by AIBU, 80% of society (women...?) is made up of gumption-less, unassertive wet blankets?)

So, I get annoyed with DH [dear husband] that he doesn't notice the mound of recycling waiting to go outside, the washing on the line that needs to come in, dishwasher that is full, things that need putting away... need I go on..? I admit, I ignore it for a while then lose the plot a bit telling him how he does little to help. He will then do jobs. He accuses me of nagging and the cheeky bugger said if I just "asked nicely" he would willingly do these things.

[...] AIBU to think this is BS? [bullshit]

(OP of Are men wired differently or is this a BS excuse?)

I had a similar issue with my DH. [...] I felt an enormous amount of rage and resentment.

(response on *Are men wired differently or is this a BS excuse?*)

Distinct aroma of bovine excrement. Some men don't see the mess because they've been socialised to expect the house skivvy (aka A Woman) will do it. Nothing to do with wiring or DNA. Luckily the merry reminder of you not being there to be his servant should rectify it if he is a decent man.

And by the way saying you are nagging and asking you to ask nicely is a real c***ish thing to say.

(response on *Are men wired differently or is this a BS excuse?*)

Performative comedy rage

I still think I want to start a campaign encouraging women to be less afraid to Stir Shit Up. Do A Different. Roar Like A Really Motherf***ing Annoyed Squirrel. Yeah.

(response on AIBU to think that judging by AIBU, 80% of society (women...?) is made up of gumption-less, unassertive wet blankets?)

AIBU is *full* of women stirring shit up TBF 🤪

(response on AIBU to think that judging by AIBU, 80% of society (women...?) is made up of gumption-less, unassertive wet blankets?)

Ladies, I think I might be on the verge of having a mini-rebellion. [...] AIBU to say "Enough is enough!" I will continue to try to balance his hours/wage with mine by doing more than a 50% share of the housework, but if he wants to do these extra events, then it's up to him to take on 100% of the work associated therewith?

(OP of To say "ENOUGH!")

Deflected frustration

All you can do is change the sphere you are in from unappreciated doormat to lazy bitch who doesn't give a damn and be comfortable in your new role as others look on in horror. You need to reclaim your truth and he will have to accept it (eventually)

(response on *To say "ENOUGH!"*)

Or carry on as your and get used to really starting to hate yourself. All self respect and self esteem a thing of the past.

(response on *To say "ENOUGH!"*)

For myself, and I am probably quite LTB [leave the bastard]/Tell them to FO [f*** off], I think I get frustrated because I see shades of my former self in some of the OPs. [...] I was very emotionally damaged and it took going NC [no contact] and doing a lot of work on myself to get to where I am now. So maybe for some of us there is an element of projection where we are trying to shake up the OP because we really do understand where they are, and we want them to wake up and realise that they can do something about it.

(response on *To say "ENOUGH!"*)

Secrecy and dirtiness

P: I don't really use it, it's kind of like it's kind of like [laughs] my . **dirty hobby** in a way, I read it a lot. If I'm on a train sometimes I have to travel for work so I'd be on a train, and it's just quick and easy to read ahem and I it's not something I would use for ahem - I don't really use it for advice or ahem gauging an opinion or something, I find . I generally I find it quite interesting as a sort of a barometer of - issues that other people face

(Chancey, 37, senior trial manager, 2 children (6 and 4 years))

P: And also you don't talk about being on Mumsnet . it's kind of a **secret** because people . I don't know like we never say to other people oh we are on Mumsnet because people are funny about it, a lot of people really don't like it

I: In what way? What are they saying?

P: They just think it's . I don't know, it's just a weird thing, it's almost like what is said on Mumsnet stays on Mumsnet, it's almost like a **secret society** that nobody actually admits being part of ...

(Caren, 37, housekeeper and craft home business entrepreneur, 1 child (7 years))

Distortion of reality

P: I mean yeah we feel we do pretty much half and have an equal relationship, he does all the cooking and all the shopping and everything and I do a lot of the housework. ... I sometimes think **even the constant complaints on Mumsnet, and obviously you read it, can be very negative**, that it's always the woman doing everything. But **even that in itself is planted as an idea consciously in people's head** . that as much as they are whinging about it, it is still . [they keep doing it] and I think that's . Mumsnet is great but it's quite . **insidious** I think that's the word, you know **it just drip-feeds these little things into your head sometimes ...**

There's no awareness of [some kinds]. Mumsnet is really **vicious**, I don't think I would ever ask for relationship advice because they will take the littlest thing and turn it into something huge and most of the time it's not you know. You've just fallen out over one thing.

People get too invested in it ... So I think people do think it's much friendlier and much real than it actually is, it's **still a bunch of strangers on the Internet who don't know you and don't really care** [chuckles], just want you to leave your husband so they get a thrill out of [that] thread.

I find Mumsnet a lot less equal than my real life I think. I don't know whether that is because I work in a firm . going out to work in a professional environment there are a lot women and a lot of them have children and kind of making it happen, making it work sorry that's the word I mean. Whereas Mumsnet I think possibly because going back to the idea of having a community and being lonely, you do get more women on there who aren't working or don't have something [fulfilling] in their life

(Sarah, 39, senior legal researcher, 2 children (2 and 7 years))

Dragging down

P: I did ah I had a very bad depression period where I was more active into like this support type of thing that Mumsnet has, but then I realised it's just helped to drag me down ...

Ah not because [exhales] they're strangers, but because .. it feels like [you're] victimising yourself too much. ... I think when you go into this vicious cycle where my husband did this, and you have like 300 people say he's a bastard

it's not [doing] you well, but . and it's very easy for people to say what you should do.

(María, 34, corporate analyst, 2 children (3 and 5 years))