
The Other Side of *Moms*

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The stories, articles, and interviews appear everywhere. At no time in history has so much media coverage focused on women. Especially women who are mothers. So with all that is being written, broadcast, and viewed these days, you might think that marketers wanting to reach moms would have a clear view of this prolific target audience. Think again.

In a series of proprietary research studies presented in 2006 by the Ms. & Mom Marketing practice at Draftfcb, we found that marketers are missing the mark—big time—in reaching today’s moms. Simply put, she’s not who marketers think she is.

Today’s mom is better described as “a woman with children,” which means most marketers would do well to trash their outdated target of “mom.” She is so much more. Our reality check clearly illustrated that women are laced with complexities that make them multidimensional *at all times*. There are really *many women* embedded inside of *every woman* and reaching the total woman is critical to any successful marketing effort.

SHE’S MULTIDIMENSIONAL

Amidst many of the reports flooding into the marketing arena stating that technology and frag-

menting media are causing a major breakdown in the effectiveness of traditional advertising, the reality is that many marketers are also reaching out to their consumers with the wrong messages.

For example, our research shows that retrograde stereotypes and misperceptions have most marketers talking to just “moms” and using old, “traditional” messages that are sometimes meaningless and often offensive to today’s woman.

More importantly, women are now starting to resent it. More than one-third of the mothers participating in our study said they are often offended by the way they are portrayed in advertising. In addition, more than 68 percent indicated they would like to be spoken to as more than just a mom.

Only 20 percent feel that advertising depicts moms accurately. And of even greater significance to marketers, 55 percent—more than half—agree they would react more positively if marketers spoke to them not just as a mom, but as a multidimensional woman. Let’s reiterate—not just a mom, but a woman. Giving birth doesn’t strip women of their pre-mom identities, and marketers need to remember that.

*She’s
not who
you think
she is.*

SHE’S NOT EITHER/OR

The journey leading to these findings began because the Ms. & Mom group—all of us women *and* moms as well as professional marketers—too often failed to see ourselves in the multiple creative briefs that passed over our desks on a daily basis. Those briefs usually read “Women 25-54” or “Moms 25-54.” Seemingly, you’re either one or the other.

Yet we felt “moms,” appearing on countless briefs and surely one of the largest targets in marketing, weren’t well understood. If you’re buying paper towels, marketers speak to you like you’re a mom. If you’re buying pantyhose, you’re a woman. Right? Wrong. What about the woman inside of the mom? Is there one? Or is she gone?

After Tivo-ing several days of television directed at moms, we developed a reel that clearly illustrated the polarization of women into 1) happy moms mopping up milk spills, vs. 2) evening-gowned goddesses with beautiful hair color, such as Heather Locklear, telling those same milk-spill moms that they're "worth it."

In every case, women are depicted as either/or—which is the result of marketers marketing to the lowest common denominator, *i.e.*, milk-spills = moms; make-up = women. But do women think like that? If the advertising we're seeing is working, then women must surely have a firewall, making them one half woman, one half mom—clearly delineated halves that don't overlap. Right?

Today's Mom wishes advertisers and marketers would speak to her true self

68%

would like to be spoken to as more than just a mom

80%

feel that advertising does not depict moms accurately

34%

find that they are often offended

55%

say they would react more positively if spoken to as a multidimensional woman

SOURCE: Draftfcb

Our research proved that hypothesis dead wrong.

To explore and better understand female multidimensionality, and to find out to what extent the "mom" side and the "woman" side truly thought differently, we used an innovative research concept, followed by a quantitative survey to a large nationwide sample. We set up intimate meetings with women—all moms 25-49, of diverse races, some working, some not, half from an affluent neighborhood, and half from a rural town.

The get-togethers included a morning coffee-and-conversation session and then an evening wine-and-cheese session with the same individuals. The intent was to determine if talking to moms in the morning would result in different answers and mindsets than when talking to the same women in the evening. It didn't happen.

Instead we learned that the mom and the woman are inseparable. The two don't think, act, and feel profoundly different at different times or on different subjects because they are inextricably linked. They play both roles at once, each fighting the other for air-time and dominance. And she wishes advertisers and marketers would speak to her true self. So who is that true self?

SHE'S STRESSED

An overarching theme that emerged from the study was stress:

- Women are struggling to preserve their pre-mom selves. They suffer from a loss of personal identity. More than a time-management issue, mothers lament their serious loss of self, saying "I know what I do, I just don't know who I am."
- The indescribable joys of motherhood are paired with the incredible guilt of wanting something for herself.
- Personal interests are often abandoned and simple pleasures, like attending a play or just keeping up on current events, have become a lost luxury.
- Only one in 10 women feels she has balance in her dual roles as mother and individual.
- A whopping 61 percent agree that they don't have enough time for themselves.
- Some 58 percent feel guilty when taking time to do something for themselves.
- Societal and pop-culture cues lead 57 percent of women to feel the pressure to be perfect mothers at the expense of taking care of themselves.

SHE'S CHANGING

The two dimensions—either/or—undoubtedly emanate from stereotypes and a lack of understanding of today's women. Marketers see them in this two-

“Most marketers would do well to trash their target of Mom. It’s outdated.”

dimensional way ... two dimensions that are in fact, inseparable.

Moreover, there are many dimensions surrounding these women, dimensions that are shifting dramatically. For example:

- 70 percent of women 25-54 with kids work outside the home.
- 21 percent of these moms are also grandmothers.
- 3 percent just had their first baby, while 2 percent just had their youngest leave the nest.
- 72 percent are married; but guess what?
- 28 percent are single.

SHE’S PERHAPS SINGLE? AND STEREOTYPED?

The overwhelming number of moms who are single in the U.S. is a dimension that has changed dramatically in recent decades. As marketers, do we understand this segment and wisely advertise and market to this target woman? Or is it likely, since we’ve stereotyped moms, we’ve further stereotyped single moms? Indeed we have.

What percentage of single women with children are in the following age groups?

	Marketers	Reality	Difference
18-24	35%	12%	191%
25-34	27%	24%	12%
35-44	22%	35%	37%
45-54	17%	29%	41%

What percentage of single women with children have completed the following grade levels?

	Marketers	Reality	Difference
Never HS	31%	19%	63%
HS	37%	37%	—
College	22%	38%	42%
Grad School	11%	29%	83%

SOURCES: Simmons and Draftfcb

Draftfcb conducted a nationwide quantitative survey in the fall of 2006 with 500 advertising and marketing professionals in agency and client organizations across the United States. The results were stunning.

Marketers are using pre-conceived stereotypes that, in reality, do not exist. As a result, they are way off the mark when reaching out to today’s single mothers. Marketers see single women with children as younger, less educated, more ethnic, and less dimensional than they really are, and that stereotype is taking precedence over reality. To wit:

- **Single mothers are older than marketers believe:** Marketers believe that 35 percent of single women with children are between the ages of 18-24. In truth, a mere 12 percent are in this age group—a 191 percent difference between perception and reality. Marketers also believe that only 22 percent of these moms are between the ages of 35-44, when in fact 35 percent are within this range and represent the largest of any age group.
- **Single mothers are much more educated than marketers give them credit for:** The study showed that only 19 percent of single moms did not complete high school compared to marketers’ estimate of 31 percent—a 63 percent difference between marketers’ belief and reality. Marketers, in fact, believe that 68 percent of single moms have only a high-school education or less, while in truth, 81 percent have a high-school education or more.
- **Single mothers are more often white than marketers suppose:** Marketers erroneously believe that 38 percent—or a majority of single women with children—are African-American. In fact, white women make up the majority, representing 58 percent of single moms, while marketers said that only 24 percent fell within this category. Another significant difference between belief and fact was that marketers said 32 percent of single women with children are Hispanic. In fact, only 16 percent are (a 100 percent difference).
- **Single mothers see themselves as stronger, more multidimensional than marketers think:** In an attitude portion of the study, marketers were asked to allocate characteristics such as brave, courageous, creative, inventive, refined, gracious, etc. to either a “single mom,” “married mom,” or “unsure” category.

Matching the allocations to realities documented in consumer research studies showed that marketers' attitudinal understanding is as skewed as their demographic misperceptions. Marketers allocated single moms to only a limited selection of characteristics; while single moms, far more than the marketers, see themselves as strong, involved, interesting, interested, multidimensional, and more.

Significantly, marketers participating in the study were asked who they think the single mom is, and regardless of the marketer's gender, race, marital status, parenting status, geography, or age, there was little difference in the opinions of those surveyed.

The number of single moms has doubled over the past three decades, to 28 percent in 2006, and their decision-making power and brand loyalty make them very important. They are a valuable, growing market that is not going away and it is critical that marketers get it right in reaching these women.

Yet, marketers are off—way off—when it comes to speaking to single mothers, who are older than perceived, more educated, more dimensional, and these days perhaps having children not by chance, but by choice.

TV's *Desperate Housewives* is wildly successful in part because of its smart portrayal of housewives who are as comfortable in a corset as they are in a *cul-de-sac*.

McDonald's—one of the nation's largest marketers—has seen the light and not only encourages moms to buy Happy Meals for their kids, but offers premium salads for the women inside those moms. And at Draftfcb we have, among many such marketing efforts, created an award-winning, integrated campaign for MilkPEP, now in its third year, that altered the way we portrayed women.

This campaign literally and figuratively changed the shape of milk and its consumption, and resulted in double-digit sales increases. That campaign all began with revising the brief target from “mom” to “women with children.”

SHE'S YOURS FOR THE TAKING

Something dramatic is happening. Pop culture knows it. Women with children know it. Marketers need to get it.

Marketers need to strike “mom” from the brief. From their conversations. She's evolved. The clarion

“Marketers who start embracing the woman inside the mom, and the embedded women inside of every woman, will find themselves rewarded.”

SHE AWAITS THE RIGHT MARKETERS

There is evidence that the quest to merge the mom and the woman and send the right messages has begun, led by pop culture and pioneered by a few perceptive marketers.

A recent campaign, for example, from maternity clothes retailer Pea in the Pod, features the first phase of motherhood as a beautiful state of womanhood. And while it takes its inspiration from Demi Moore's famous *Vanity Fair* cover of 15 years ago, Demi probably had no idea that her then-controversial profile pioneered a change in our concept of pregnancy and women as moms.

Recent books that have achieved great success such as *The Three Martini Playdate*, *Sippy Cups Are Not for Chardonnay*, and *Confessions of a Slacker Mom*, are not targeted to moms, but to women who are moms.

Similarly, exciting new websites such as SeeMommyRun.com and Hot Moms Club give women who are moms a place to connect and strut their stuff. Indeed,

call is to use a more accurate portrayal of who she is complete with all of her dimensions as opposed to an unrealistic idolization, caricature, or stereotype. She's had enough of that. She is a woman with children—and wants it that way.

Moms are not a narrow target. Marketers talking to mythical “moms” who don't exist simply don't get it. Marketers who start embracing the woman inside the mom, and the embedded women inside of every woman, will find themselves rewarded. She will reward you. She will advocate for you. And she will be back. ■



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