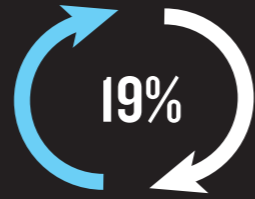


KEY FINDINGS:
WHAT MUMS REALLY THINK



only 1 in 5 believe there are any examples of mums in advertising they can relate to



of all mums believe motherhood defines them



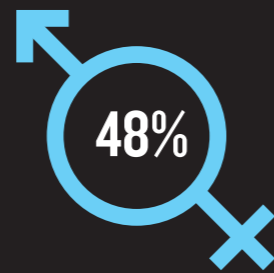
mothers admit they are 'me first and then a mum'



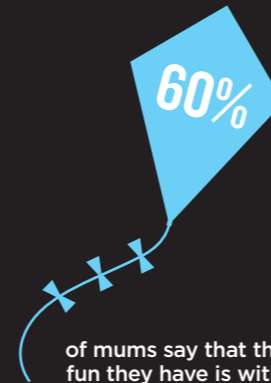
less than a quarter of mothers are happy with people other than their family members calling them 'mum'



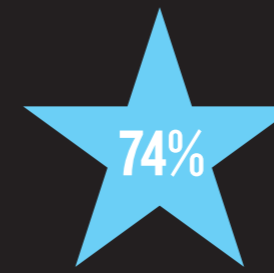
believe that motherhood has made them more reserved



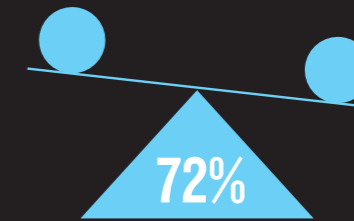
believe topics like sex are off the table now that they are mothers



of mums say that the best fun they have is with their kids and that their kids are more fun than most adults they know



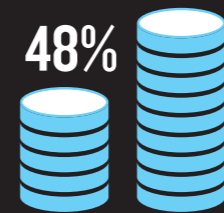
of mums agree they are not perfect and are not trying to be



of all mums are happy with the balance in their life, including work, family and home



of working mums feel guilty about working



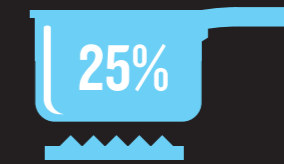
of mums believe that having a paid job would make them happier



only a fifth of mums believe stay at home mums are the ideal mother



of mums agree their partner is just as involved as they are in parenting



of mums believe their partner isn't doing enough around the house

THE TRUTH ABOUT MUMS

Challenging our myths about marketing to mothers

“

Here's a newsflash for all you advertisers. Most mums have clutter, but not chaos, tidiness but not perfection; and we are all second-guessing ourselves all of the time, so making it more difficult doesn't help! Please, I realise you all have targets to make, stereotypes to depict, money to count, but treat parents as intelligent people, not as 'just a parent'.

”

Mum of 1, from Scotland

MUM

As an industry, we use one little three-letter word to label the nearly 18 million women in the UK that have children. We spend £1.9 billion targeting this population of primary shoppers. But is that money well spent?

We talked to nearly 900 mums through both qualitative and quantitative (IPSOS) research. We also asked the 8,000 strong Mumsnet parent's panel.

And we found that marketing has got mums wrong, dreadfully wrong. [Only 19% of mothers in the UK believe there are any examples of mums in advertising that they can relate to.](#)

Our findings reveal that marketing today is working to a series of myths about mothers, which if they were ever true are now tired and clichéd.

The lives of mums have changed immeasurably in the past twenty years and it's time - and long overdue - for marketing to catch up.

MYTH #1

Motherhood defines mums

MYTH

The majority of advertising communications aimed at mothers suggest that the life of the average British woman with children is all about being a mum.

The reality is that less than half of Mums believe motherhood defines them, and as many as 3 out of 10 mothers say that they are 'me first and then a mum'.

Crucially, only 23% of mothers are happy with people outside their families calling them "mum". Yet we, in marketing, do it all the time.

REVELATION:
MOTHERS HATE BEING DEFINED SIMPLY AS A MUM.

“

I would never define myself as a Mum, of course I am a mum but I like to see myself as an independent person.

”

-Mum of 3, from North London

The clear implication from our research is that [marketers can't afford to lose sight of the woman behind the mother](#). Motherhood is a role and a responsibility - but it does not define the individual. Mothers feel this keenly. Talking about her children, one told us:

“

They won't remember the things that I taught them, but they will remember the person I was.

”

MYTH #2

Mums are 'practically perfect in every way'

MYTH

Advertising's "mum" is desperately seeking perfection, and is looking to brands to help her achieve it, whether by giving her the sparkliest tiles, or helping her have the best-fed children. In real life, British mums are a long way from this ideal. More importantly, for them, it isn't an ideal at all.

REVELATION:
MOTHERS ARE NOT AND DO NOT WANT TO BE PERFECT

“

As shocking as it may seem, my husband is more likely to come home to a scene that resembles an exploded Toys 'R' Us, with two whining, dirty-faced urchins fighting over the last breadstick and a frazzled, stressing red-faced partner who is trying to get something vaguely edible on the table before she has to run off to work.

”

-Mum of 2, from the North West

Nearly three quarters of the mothers we surveyed agreed that "they are not perfect but then they aren't trying to be", and only 9% said that they had ever met a perfect mother.

“

We all suck the stains off their rugby shirts and pack them back into the bag because we forgot to wash them.

”

-Mum of 2, from Bath

Marketers need to embrace the messiness of motherhood rather than presenting their brands as the route to parental perfection. Many of our respondents were actually negative about the concept of a "perfect mother". [Brands that cling too close to this stereotype might even be in danger of alienating the audience they are trying to attract.](#)

MYTH #3

Mums are prudes

MYTH

Marketers seem to place mums on a moral pedestal. Marketing mums don't swear, don't drink a little too much, don't laugh at the same stuff as the rest of us and most importantly don't have sex (which if you think about it is just a little ironic).

But talk to any real mum and you'll know that they are fully functioning adults with the same desires, failings, frustrations and sense of humour as any other adult in the UK.

Only 28% of our respondents agreed that motherhood has made them more reserved, and only 23% felt that they should not discuss certain subjects, like sex, now they are mums.

REVELATION:

MOTHERS OFTEN HAVE A DARK AND SOMETIMES DIRTY SENSE OF HUMOUR.

'Mummy Porn' is incredibly successful. And let's not forget that the mothers you are targeting now are the same people who observed, and perhaps wholeheartedly participated in, the dance and drug culture of the '90s.

Despite the life changes that they have experienced since then, and the responsibility they now have as mothers, these women have not morphed into entirely different people. [And their worst fear is that they have, or will become, "mumsy"](#).

It is high time that marketing stopped treating mums as children but instead recognises them for the adult human beings that they are.

“

What comes out of my mouth doesn't make me less of a mum! I swear, I make jokes, and talk about sex more than the average person and it has absolutely no effect on my parenting skills.

”

-Mum from mumsnet community panel

MYTH #4

Dads are sideshows in the parenting department

MYTH

Many marketers appear to believe that the quickest way to curry favour with mums is to point out the deficiencies in their men. Communications portray mum as the main parent; the one who has the answers and who her children rely on. Dad is a bit player in parenting, a clown at best and at worst, utterly useless.

REVELATION:

DADS ARE FULL PARTNERS IN PARENTHOOD AND INCREASINGLY SEEN TO PULL THEIR WEIGHT.

In reality, dads are seen by mums as a fully capable parent. [60% of mums told us that their partner is just as involved in parenting as they are. Only 25% believed that their partner does not do enough around the house.](#)

“

The bumbling husband, clever wife adverts are just cringeworthy. They were probably funny a few years ago, but now it's just another stereotype, and a boring one at that.

”

-Mum of 1, from Scotland

This is not about new ways of marketing to dads. But our research suggests that mums would think more positively about a brand that recognises, reflects, and understands the role that their partners play within the family unit.

“

I am not the only parent in my household - there happens to be an adult male living here too... he is a fully functioning, responsible adult who is perfectly capable of being with, not 'looking after' or 'babysitting' his own children.

”

-Mum of 2, from the North West

MYTH #5

Motherhood is a life of drudgery

MYTH

Advertising mum is consumed by a life of relentless drudgery, frazzled juggling and insane feats of time management. And of course all of this is true – parenthood can be bloody hard work.

But this perspective also ignores a simple truth: that sharing your life with your children is also really good fun.

REVELATION:
MOTHERHOOD IS THE MOST FUN YOU CAN HAVE WITH YOUR CLOTHES ON.

“

To be honest these days I'd rather go out for a meal with the kids – it's more fun than going out with our mates.

”

-Mum of 3, from the North East

Mums are enjoying their kids, a lot; 60% of mums we spoke to say that the best fun they have is with their kids, and the same percentage go so far as to say that their kids are more fun to spend time with than most of the adults they know.

It's time for us to recognise and represent the sheer joy and fun that exists in motherhood.

MYTH #6

Mums are happiest at home and in the kitchen

MYTHS

If marketers are to be believed, mothers work (if they work at all) out of economic necessity. They'd far rather be at home in the kitchen.

REVELATION:
MOTHERS SEE WORKING AS THE NEW IDEAL.

In reality, only 20% of mothers agreed that the stay at home mum is the ideal mum and most of those that don't work told us that having a paid job would make them a happier mother.

Working is not simply an economic necessity, rather it is of critical importance to the identity and sense of self for most mothers – not to mention that many mums think that staying at home is the harder option.

And they don't feel guilty either. 72% of mothers agreed that they are happy with the balance of their life, and only 13% of mums in paid work feel guilty about working rather than being at home.

“

I've talked about being a stay at home mum and decided I couldn't do it. Although I absolutely adore Charlie it suits us both to have other things going on.

”

Mum of 1, from Surbiton

So please, let's get mums out of the kitchen and recognise that women with children have all sorts of lives. They don't feel chained to the stove like the mothers in a 1960s sitcom.

MARKETING ALONE IS NOT TO BLAME

But before we give ourselves too hard a time about the way we represent mothers and motherhood, we should remember that society at large is doing no better.

The media's representation of motherhood does nothing to dispel the myths. We've all read headlines like: "Having it all? More like doing it all"; "Are you mum enough?"; or "I love my children. I hate my life".

As a society, we treat women with children as a single and uniform group united by a single and simplistic label. But the word "mum" simply doesn't do justice to the complex lives of women with children. As one mum rightly pointed out: "Mums are a diverse group, where often the only unifying factor is that we have children. Mothers are from all socio-economic groups, all walks of life, and yet are so often lumped together as one homogenous mass".

We believe that the "mum" label entirely obscures the extraordinary diversity in the experience and attitudes of British mothers. Beyond the early days of a child's birth, mothers are far more divided than they are united. And they are divided in exactly the same way as the rest of our society, according to class, income, education, geography and ethnicity.

STOP CALLING HER "MUM"

If mothers have evolved, it is time for marketing to evolve with them. Perhaps the easiest way to achieve this is to stop using the "mum" label altogether. Ban it as an audience definition. Refuse to accept it on a creative brief. Instead, spend time thinking about women with children as just as exciting, complex, interesting and diverse as the rest of your audience – and pay them the same respect.

After all, only 23% of mothers are happy with people other than their families calling them ...

MUM

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