

Bigfoot, Dragons, and Supermoms...They Don't Exist

By Katherine Wintch

A very wise mother once told me that being a mom is like "swimming and learning to swim at the same time." As the mother of a one-year-old who likes to take his diaper off at the most inopportune times and a three-year-old who insists on dressing like a "Spice Girl," I feel as though my head is barely above water most days. Yet the mothers I see on TV and in magazines appear as though they could swim freestyle professionally.

Just last week I found myself in a particularly ironic situation in the grocery store checkout line. After I told my three-year-old she couldn't have any more chocolate, she threw herself on the floor and started screaming, "You are so mean to me, Mommy!" I quickly looked around to see who was bearing witness to this horrible fit and found myself staring face-to-face with four gorgeous moms on the cover of four glossy magazines. As if the pictures weren't enough, the headlines shouted, "Daily discipline that really works," and "How to wow your husband in bed."

Talk about kicking me while I'm down.

The mothers I sit with at playgrounds and borrow diapers from in bathrooms don't look, feel, or act like the mothers I see on television and in magazines. The mothers I know look like they're doggy-paddling their way through some pretty long days.

So many of us start out with super-high expectations (I'm going to make my own baby food and catch him before every fall") yet super-low confidence ("I have no idea what I'm doing, and I have nobody to talk to.").

This gap is what I refer to as the Perfect Mom Paradox: the internal conflict that arises when a mother's perfect expectations for herself do not match the imperfect reality of her every day. In other words, we convince ourselves we're going to make the three dozen perfect cupcakes with pink roses on top, only to end up with two dozen cupcakes with pink blobs on top.

Here's the deal: trying to be perfect is exhausting. And being a mother is already exhausting enough.

I would venture to guess 95% of people responsible for marketing and advertising today have a mom, know a mom, or are married to a mom...so why is all the advertising targeted to moms so glossy and glamorized?

Perhaps the problem is with moms themselves. Maybe we're afraid to open up and talk about how hard it is. Maybe we're all terrified other moms will say we're crazy if we admit our kids sometimes make us crazy.

Let's break that cycle. Let's let each other know it's perfectly OK to be imperfect. It's natural to not know what you're doing when you're a mother. Why is everyone walking around like it's so easy? The profound purpose of motherhood (raising productive, happy, and healthy human beings) comes with a lot of pressure. And that's OK.

Just like any pressure, talking about it makes it better, and ignoring it makes it worse. Moms and marketers have a history of ignoring and therefore contributing to the Perfect Mom Paradox.

Let's speak up. Stop the madness, mom people. Moms who say their life isn't hard aren't superheroes, they're liars.

Apparently idealizing motherhood is an international language spoken around the world. I recently heard from a mother in Italy, "Ads always represent ideal situations with beautiful and smiling children surrounded by relaxed and calm parents."

How many of you would use the word "calm" to describe raising a three-year-old? I'm willing to bet that even the supermom staring at me in the checkout line would agree that my life was anything but calm that day...and most every other day.

As a mother of two and award-winning strategic planner for one of the nation's leading advertising agencies, Katherine Wintch's worlds collided when she discovered that moms and marketers were in a crisis of understanding. Neither moms nor marketers were being truthful with themselves or each other. As the founder of The Mom Complex, Katherine is helping moms and marketers talk to each other in a voice that is understanding, honest, and impactful. In addition to her role as founder of The Mom Complex, Katherine serves as vice president and Group Planning director at the Martin Agency, where she specializes in understanding and depicting the lives of real moms and is currently running the strategic planning efforts for the world's largest marketer to moms, Walmart. Join the conversation about what it is really like to be a mom at [Facebook.com/MomComplex](https://www.facebook.com/MomComplex).