Battling “Perfect Mom” Syndrome with Moms and Marketers

A very wise mother once told me that being a mom is like “swimming and learning to swim at the same time.” As a mother of a two-year-old who insists on peeing on the potty but pooping in his underwear, and a four-year-old who only responds to being called Snow White…I feel as though my head is barely above water most days. And that’s OK!

So someone please tell me why moms in television commercials are always calm and happy and obsessed with cleaning their homes while grinning from ear to ear? And why are they always thin, white, married and upper-middle class…when 41% of all births in 2010 were to single mothers?

It’s not like we’re talking about some rare species of consumers. I’m willing to bet that every marketer in America is a mom, has a mom, is married to a mom, or some combination of the three. So it’s not like they don’t have access to real mothers to talk to. And yet, three out of four mothers in the U.S. say marketers have “no idea” what it’s like to be a mother — a pretty startling statistic considering marketers spend billions of dollars researching moms every single year. And a crying shame, considering moms control 85% of household purchases.

To help moms and marketers get real, I created The Mom Complex — a global think tank designed to help moms and marketers better understand each other. We’re making it easier for companies around the world to develop better products, services and communications for the way moms *actually* live.

I believe there are two reasons marketers are missing the mark. First, they’re asking the wrong questions. Instead of asking moms what it’s like to be a mother, they ask moms what it’s like to “consume” their soda or “utilize” their kitchen mixer — not exactly the path to enlightenment. The second problem is that moms lie. They lie to themselves and to marketers when it comes to how they’re doing. We’ve all done it. We say we’re “doing fine” when in reality we’re overwhelmed, overworked and so tired we could cry. And we do cry. A lot.

It’s not easy to get honest answers from moms in traditional research settings like focus groups, because moms tend to posture in front of moms they don’t know. You know: the whole “I got this gig under control” response that’s not even half true. To get around this, we created Opinion Parties™ — a fun and innovative research methodology where a mom invites her mom-friends to her home to talk about what it’s like to be a mom. Real friends get together in their homes to talk about real life with the goal of effecting real change.

It’s OK 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 and happy 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.

My hope is that at The Mom Complex, we can help marketers understand and meet the needs of today’s moms. We’re out to change the world, one mom at a time.

Katherine Wintsch is the Founder of The Mom Complex. She has been featured in *The New York Times*; *The Wall Street Journal*; *Forbes*, *Inc.*; *The Huffington Post* and on *The Today Show*.