

The Green Mom Eco-cosm:

A Social Study into their Motivations,
Convictions and Influence



A Research Study by



With Introduction by
Sustainability, Gender,
and Consumer Behavior Expert,
Andrea Learned.

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ON



Introduction

by Andrea Learned

For anyone even remotely tracking the “green” movement, so much has been written and researched lately, that it can be hard to keep up. What has been interesting in marketing to women specifically, and from my perspective, is that — whatever the topic—the research is still quite linear, or traditional (and highly quantitative). How can we expect to gain an understanding of a woman’s complex buying path by boiling it down to a numbers crunching process? With the sustainable, or “green” movement in particular, the ins and outs — or, the elements of a woman’s holistic buying process that go outside that darned line — are the key to understanding and learning to better serve. We can’t chart that in a spreadsheet!

That’s why partnering with the Social Studies Group for this white paper was so appealing to me, and why we hope our findings reflect more of the “whys” behind than the “hows” about green mom consumer behavior. To begin, it helps to remember that the women we studied are not one homogenous segment. Just like the women’s market in general, the individual green mom bloggers whose posts we reviewed and filtered came to their beliefs or values from different backgrounds and circumstances. And, our research found that their interest went way beyond mere curiosity. These women have a definite *hunger* for products and solutions to help their families live more sustainably, and they are enthusiastically pursuing “green products” that fit the lifestyles they want to achieve.

The surprises? Many of the green mom bloggers who are on the more radical or fully committed end of the spectrum are perhaps not the nutty margin you’d assume. Even though “green consumerism” is something these committed women may personally try to avoid, they still recognize the value of measures being taken by companies like Clorox to head in a greener direction. Furthermore, through their blog post writing, these moms have been sharing higher expectations and actively *challenging* their readers toward significantly uncomfortable levels of green scrutiny and commitment. No slackers need apply. It seems that the more women know, the more engaged they become with their lifestyle “greening up” efforts. You can almost feel the momentum building.


Given our findings, these women appear to be moving deliberately along their green paths, even if that means they take the occasional stumble — and their peers/readers are listening. Read on to see if you agree.

Executive Summary

As companies watch societal awareness of environmental issues grow, strategic responses are being considered with greater frequency and urgency in many boardrooms. Perhaps this is a conversation occurring in your boardroom this very minute. How do you evolve your product or service to meet the needs of a changing society, one where the safety concerns new parents grapple with not only include installing a car seat properly and ensuring electrical outlets are covered, but examining the types of plastics used in the sippy cups they purchase? This is the new reality.

[The Social Studies Group](#), together with Gender and Eco-Trends Expert [Andrea Learned](#), wanted to dig into this topic, focusing on a defined subset of the US population: self-identifying “green” moms. Our intent: to find out how this influential group of the eco-conscious public thinks.

To determine the motivations and convictions influencing how green moms are managing their households, raising their children and shaping their purchasing decisions, we immersed ourselves in the discussions within the community of green mothers who blog.¹ It’s tempting to think of green moms as one cohesive body of like-minded women. It would certainly make the jobs of corporate decision-makers, product developers and marketers much easier. But doing so would be a mistake. This community of eco-minded women extends well beyond any specific socio-economic indicators or geographic region. Perhaps more important to understanding this market than these demographic measures, is to appreciate that “green mothers” is an expansive term encompassing women with widely varying degrees of consumption, commitment to green issues, eco-knowledge, and motivation to be green.



It is the diversity within the community among these four measures that has resulted in unexpected challenges in targeting products and marketing campaigns to green moms. By listening to what these mothers are saying and what they are actually *doing* — we arrived at three primary categories that capture and attempt to explain the majority of green moms for these purposes: the **Super Greens**, the **Eco-Moderates** and the **Mainstream Greens**. Two distinct profiles deserving of additional attention are tucked primarily within these categories: the **Natural Parenting/ Simple Living Enthusiasts** and the **Frugal and Greens**. Each of these categories and profiles are summarized in this report.

In addition, we look at some primary contradictions within the community at large, and the varying definitions of what it means to live/to be green. That the definition can vary greatly among consumers should come as no surprise. Rather than being the product of an industry board or government panel, Ryan Schuchard, Manager of Environmental Research & Innovation with BSR, an organization that works with

¹ More than 300 blogs were identified and examined in this study. To be selected for inclusion, a blog had to meet the following criteria: the bloggers must be mothers, they must have a self proclaimed commitment to environmental/green issues, and the most recent blog post must have occurred within the past three months.

companies on matters of corporate responsibility, described the industry environmental standards as “emergent,” meaning they are the result of constantly updating deliberations in a complex system. This emphasizes the importance of a company’s continued observation of all voices in the green mom community.

Differences in motivations and ideologies aside, the one factor tying all of these women together is a desire to lessen their impact on the environment, even if the steps they take may vary, and greatly.

Key Factors | Before looking at the specific categories and profiles that emerged during our study of green moms, it is important to understand some of the basic characteristics that define them: consumption, commitment to green issues, eco-knowledge, and the driving motivation to be green.

Why They Blog

- The desire to increase environmental awareness
- To provide information on the how’s and why’s of possible solutions
- To hold business and government accountable for their impact on the environment and families
- To increase accountability of her own actions
- As a diary of her journey into parenting and a more environmentally sustainable life

A woman’s desire to blog about her experience as an environmentally aware mother can be driven by a number of factors; including the desire to increase environmental awareness, to provide information on the how’s and why’s of possible solutions, to hold business and government accountable for their impact on the environment and families, to increase accountability of her own actions (more pressure from real/perceived audience to uphold own standards); or as a diary of her journey into parenting and a more environmentally sustainable life. Many translate their own accumulated knowledge into an income source for the family through blog ad dollars or by selling green goods or books. After having invested a great deal into green information gathering and lifestyle changes, setting up and maintaining their blog, and being mothers, these women are invested emotionally, financially and mentally in this cause. They perceive themselves to be experts of some aspect of the green movement.

Consumption | One of our key findings centers on how the women looked at in this study define what it means to be/live green. At the same time that enthusiasm over eco-friendly products is growing, and it is indeed growing, a dialogue has begun among some green mothers concerning consumption; specifically, “Is it possible to be green without addressing consumerism as central to the equation?” The green moms within our study address their role as consumers very differently across the different profiles we are introducing.

At one extreme, there are some moms that see organic and green products as purchases to be made in addition to their normal expenditures. We tend to see these women, generally classified as Mainstream Green moms, showing enthusiasm for “green” products that do not necessarily *fill* a need. In effect, these environmentally friendly products are one of the ways these “fashionably green” moms are signaling their very green-ness.

Among our Eco-Moderate moms, the line between what is responsible consumption and green consumerism begins to blur somewhat as many mothers struggle with balancing the realities of running their households with living their convictions. They ponder; even agonize over how much change is enough. Does using a green product as a substitute for conventional offerings do enough good? Is eliminating the use of plastics enough? Driving less?

And for the staunchest of green mothers, our Super Greens, the issue of consumption is a clear-cut one: reducing their families' consumption is viewed as a personal imperative.

This topic of “green consumerism” is one of growing debate among the groups we call Super Greens and Eco-Moderates, as described by **Kelly Dinorcia** in her blog, **Ahims Mama**: *“One of my pet peeves are “green” blogs that feature frequent giveaways. I am sure that these contests drive traffic to the blogs, but is that really green? Should environmentalists be looking for the next slightly-lower-impact-product (and figuring out ways to ship said product to a reader who is potentially thousands of miles away)? Or should the goal be to decrease consumption overall? Are eco-friendly clothing/books/toys/whatevers turned into garbage any less frequently than their less-green alternatives? Is the green product boom just a way for us to continue our consumerist mindset while feeling less guilty about it?”*²

While family consumption is being addressed with varying degrees of vigor within the green mom community at large, it is a topic worth noting as an emerging theme with potentially polarizing effects. Aside from exploring where reduced consumption is a more central part of the conversation on green, we also looked at the kinds of steps mothers are taking, and other lifestyle/ideologies that are influencing their efforts to “reduce.” For those that fit into our Frugal and Green profile, the push to decrease consumption is based primarily on a desire to live well within ones means. For those that fit under our Natural Parenting/Simple Living Mothers banner, the drive is led by other convictions, such as teaching one's children that happiness isn't derived from shopping, buying, and acquiring; or that living simply is not just better for the environment, but better for individuals and for society.

Motherhood as Motivator | A seminal experience motivating many of the women in this study to live greener was the birth of a child. For some, it moves them to make drastic changes, and triggers concern over not only safety issues posed by, for example, “toxic” products and plastics inside their home, but the broader environmental implications of the cars they drive and the quality of their drinking water. This was the case for **Jennifer Khatchatrian**, founder of **Chicago Green Families** and author of the **Eco Chic Organizer**. As she explained in her blog post titled *Creating a Life*, *“I was so selfish before. Never thought beyond my amazing dinner plans or my next fashion must-have... how could I have come so far?”*

² <http://ahimsamama.blogspot.com/2009/10/garbage-is-boring.html>



*The clincher for me was staring into my new baby's eyes and knowing I was responsible. **For everything.** This little person looked to me for their every need and it was up to me to create a life for someone. ... Whoa. What could that world look like?*

Once I opened my heart for them, it was available for everyone and I started to think of our collective future and all the possibilities. From that time it has been a journey of conservation and community.”³

For other mothers, their primary green concerns reside in the issues most closely, directly and immediately tied to their children: choosing “safe” bottles and sippy cups, feeding them organic foods, clothing them in organic cotton. For these women, the concern over how the environment is impacting their families, and not how they are impacting the environment per se, is the driving concern.

There is a tension between these two primary motivators, the environment and the family, which will become more apparent when looking at how the different categories of green moms seek to find balance on their journey to be/live green.

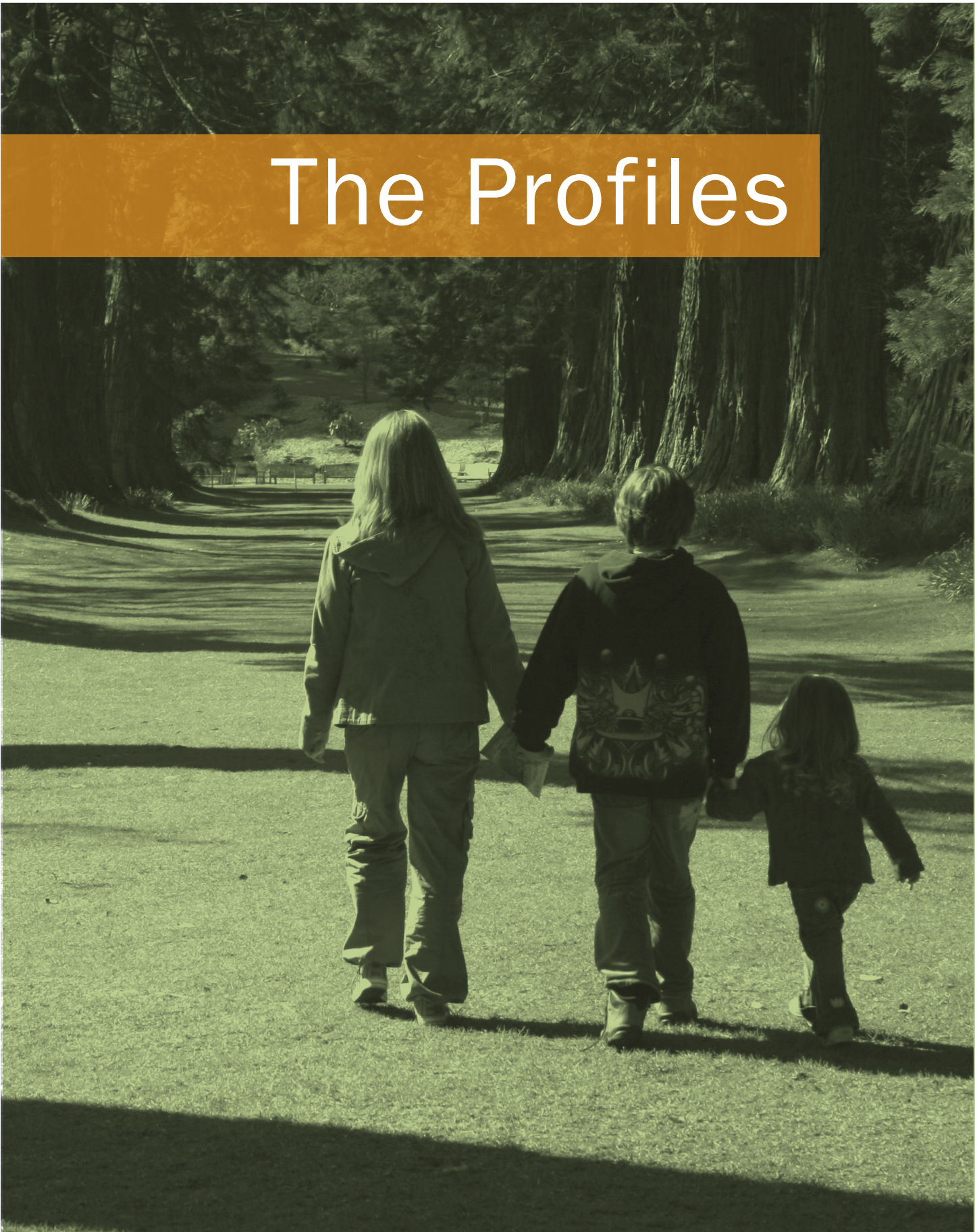
Greening as Journey (commitment to eco/knowledge) | “Journey” was a common metaphor used by many of the green moms across the spectrum to describe their efforts to green their lives. For some the decision to live more sustainably is very deliberate, starting when they look online for direction on how and where to begin, or advice on which products to avoid or seek out. Other moms fall into being green, and internalize more of the green values and their commitment as their knowledge grows. Information is being aggregated in a much more accessible way, especially among this specific community of women, and it is influencing the environmental commitment of many women through any and all of our categories of green mom.

This is why connecting with and understanding the community of Super Green and Eco-Moderate Moms (the groups we see as most committed and informed) is of such vital importance to companies large and small. Right now these women have created for themselves a powerful role as industry watchdogs and whistleblowers. Through motivated sleuthing and independent testing, the viral nature of the internet and a blogger's own extensive networks, these Super Green and Eco-Moderate watchdogs are able to inform hundreds and thousands of other mothers with a single blog post of the latest product “dangers” and corporate mishaps. These women are proving to be effective at influencing the messages of traditional media and policy setters. **Nature Moms Blog** is one example of a Super Green mom that has taken on the environmental watchdog role.

The information that these women provide to a growing community is not limited to discussing such “dangers.” Green moms also maintain a strong dialogue of sharing: environmental tips, such as how to reduce waste in the home; personal struggles with green issues; support for change; challenges to increase commitment to the cause and reviews and news on green products. It is important to note that the tone and content of this dialogue varies across our categories and profiles. For example, the conversations of informed Eco-Moderate moms are very different from those of the casual Mainstream Green moms.

³ <http://www.ecochicorganizer.com/2009/10/creating-life.html>

The Profiles



The Super Greens (AKA, Watchdog Moms)

The Usual Suspects

It is common to see conversations around “where to start” in terms of going green. Following are suggestions provided time and again by green moms fielding the question.

The actions on this list also represent what most of the Super Greens are doing, and what many of the Eco-Moderates are attempting, though to a lesser degree.

- Exchange cloth towels for paper towels.
- Eliminate the use of plastic snack/food bags.
- Cut back on the use of individually packaged foods/goods. (Buy in bulk.)
- Eliminate the use of plastic water bottles.
- Recycle everything one can. (Get more savvy about what can be recycled.)
- Switch to compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs.
- Take reusable bags to the grocery store.
- Re-examine home energy use. (Adjust thermostat up in summer and down in winter.)

This is the segment of the population of green mothers farthest removed from the mainstream in terms of the lifestyle choices they are making as a result of their commitment to the environment; they are the most radical in their views.

They are the true stalwarts. What does this mean? They are incorporating their eco-convictions more thoroughly into every aspect of their and their families’ lives, closely examining how they live, the choices they make, and the products they use through a green lens. Their interpretation of what it means to be green includes recognition of reduced consumption as being vital in the effort to live more sustainably. Of the women looked at in this report, they are the ones who are most likely to be closely attuned to the politics and research connected with environmental issues, and most concerned with the broader societal implications of their actions. They are also among those most likely to be skeptical of companies marketing green products and services as they are most committed to reducing consumption/waste in general. Among these mothers, the bar is the highest in terms of the eco-standards applied to determine whether or not a product is safe, both for the environment as well as their families.

They, along with the Eco-Moderates are, in many ways, assuming the position of consumer watchdog. Once they research a product, its ingredients and the companies behind them—they are sharing what they find online. And mothers are listening to what they have to say.

How is this reflected in their homes? | Think natural: in terms of how they clean, their agents of choice are lemon juice, vinegar and baking soda. One will find few plastics in their homes (including their kitchen cupboards and refrigerators, supply closets, bathrooms, children’s bedrooms). Their garbage cans won’t be overflowing as many have committed to drastically reducing family waste. They favor used over new whenever possible; this relates to apparel, cookware, books – basically, anything they can find second-hand. They eat locally, paying attention to what foods are in season, and they support local farmers whenever possible.

They favor a natural approach to parenting, which includes breastfeeding and cloth diapering. They are very much committed to passing on their green values to their children.

Super Green Trends | When the Super Green moms speak of reducing the use of paper in their homes, the conversation has moved beyond napkins and paper towels to encompass toilet paper and feminine hygiene products. A growing trend within the staunchest of these green moms involves the exchanging of toilet paper for cloth that is washed and reused. Though many who have nixed toilet paper are making their own wipes from flannel and other materials, some do purchase reusable toilet paper from small companies selling the product online. And while products similar to the Diva Cup have been around for decades, this particular menstrual product is garnering a respectable amount of buzz.

The Eco-Moderates

It is among The Eco-Moderates that one begins to observe a more receptive, somewhat compromising attitude toward green products. Yet these women are eco-savvy and discerning. They, along with the Super Greens, are among those who scrutinize product ingredient labels, examine plastic containers for the number that signifies which type of plastic the container is made of, and very often are working actively to progress on their greening path.

They represent a broad group of mothers that is very concerned about the environment, but also with balancing the realities of juggling career, family, home and their desire to live an eco-aware, sustainable life – with limited time, and in many cases, limited resources. They are oftentimes concerned with their family's consumption, and recognize excess consumption as being central to the conversation on global sustainability.

Make it a Challenge

It's common to encounter "challenges" running within online communities of green moms. The basic premise is to motivate other like-minded mothers to continue stretching themselves to progress on their green paths. Among past challenges we encountered:

- **The Food Waste Reduction Challenge**
(Deanna Duke, Crunchy Chicken)
- **The No Plastic Holiday Challenge**
(Amy Gates, Crunchy Domestic Goddess)
- **One Can a Month Challenge**
(Enviromom)
- **The Great Coffee Cup Challenge**
(Gardening Nude)

This group of mothers talks often of eliminating/reducing their use of disposable products in their home, of participating in "challenges" to help them on their greening path. (See sidebar.) Guilt is an emotion often encountered among them. An excerpt from a post titled *Moving Forward with the Greater Good in Mind* at the blog, The **Eco Chic Organizer** speaks to the turmoil many seem to experience upon acquiring all the information about the impact of various products/decisions they make have on the environment, but at the same time dealing with the realities of their lives: "...Then Andy said some thing to me yesterday on an unrelated topic that put things into perspective. He said things didn't need to be absolute. They didn't even need to look a certain way to be true. It was about balance. Hmmm... if I can incorporate my green lifestyle into our new home, it could be enough. In fact, all of our efforts toward the greater good is enough.

Now I'm not running out and buying any gas-guzzlers anytime soon, in fact I am still trying to get rid of our dusty car, but I am planning a huge jump in space. As a family we crave it right now. Rather than see this as a badge of my wastefulness or indulgence,

perhaps I could view it as a test of my resourcefulness. I started to think of how can I make good decisions in the new home?

*For starters I am enlisting the genius of [Colori](#) for my paint needs. Next I'll turn to [Greenwerks](#) for everything outside the scope of my limited DIY expertise. My mind turns to the [organic garden](#) we can build on the 4th level and the new spacious home for [our worms](#). This next step starts to feel natural in a way and my anxiety of what I've done turns to excitement about what will be. ..."*⁴

⁴ <http://www.ecochicorganizer.com/2009/11/moving-forward-with-greater-good-in.html>

Mainstream Greens

These women are most likely to philosophically align with the concept of green consumerism. They are also more likely than any of the other profiles to shop at big box stores, but to be on the lookout for greener versions of the items they are already purchasing. Their interpretation of “green” is less tied to consumption, but to making “smarter choices” by finding the greener version of products they already use. They often talk of taking “baby steps.”

In recent years, green has become decidedly more fashionable, with more emphasis being given to design, in clothing, housewares, toys; the list goes on.

The Fashionable Side of Green

Among a certain subset of the Eco-Moderates and Mainstream Greens, purchasing decision are being influenced not only by factors such as whether or not the product is made from sustainable, non-toxic materials, but also – is it aesthetically pleasing. And many companies are responding.

For instance, children’s lunches are one area many mothers focus on “greening.” Multiple companies have launched eco-friendly lunch boxes that meet the moms eco-standards (with stainless steel and BPA free containers), in a modern, stylish design. One example: Citizenpip’s Square Meal Kit.



It is among this subset of green mothers that enthusiasm over green products is most evident. A blog post titled *Greenbee* at **Steps to Go Green**, illustrates the point: “I decided the other day to find a more earth-friendly diaper system for my son. I have been using *Huggies Little Snugglers Diapers*, as a salesperson at the local baby store said that they would be the most comfortable for my son. Some psychological mom instincts told me that only the best was fitting for my son’s bottom and I was sold. One day while throwing away yet another diaper, I realized that each of his diapers would sit in a landfill for hundreds of years. So I decided to switch from Huggies Little Snugglers Diapers to *Huggies Pure & Natural Baby Diapers*. I know it is a small step, but a step none the less. Huggies Pure & Natural Baby Diapers still adds to landfills, but apparently uses organic cotton and contains no fragrances (compared to Huggies Little Snugglers Diapers). It’s hard to say how these are “greener” – it is easy to be persuaded by advertise-ments that promise to guide me to better products. Slap “organic” or “new and improved” on the box and it seems I have some unconscious tendency to buy that brand over another product missing that crucial label.”⁵

Very often, their commitment to green centers on issues inside their home, to issues immediately and directly impacting their family. It is very common to hear among this group that the motivation to make more eco-friendly choices was motivated by the birth of a child.

In general, these mothers are less likely to be plugged into the broader eco-issues such as pollutants and air quality and the science behind whether or not organic farming is better for the environment. Instead, their focus rests primarily on how the environment is impacting their family. They are less likely to leave their comfort zone, or to make drastic lifestyle changes as a result of their greening path.

They are likely to recycle, at least to some degree, and to favor labels that include phrases like “organic” and “green.”

⁵ <http://www.stepstogogreen.com/2009/10/12/how-are-green-diapers-a-good-thing/>



Natural Parenting/Simple Lifestyle Mamas

A niche overlapping partially within the Super Greens and the Eco-Moderates is the Natural Parenting/Simple Lifestyle Mamas. Natural Parenting is a well-recognized approach to parenting that is intended to foster a closer bond, a more intuitive relationship between mother and child/father and child. Mothers who identify as “natural parenting” devotees also strongly consider themselves to be green – the choices they make for their families often fall perfectly into line with those of the Super Greens and Eco-Moderates.

Hallmarks of Natural Parenting include natural childbirth, breastfeeding, baby-wearing, cloth-diapering, co-sleeping and homeschooling. Natural Parents are also known for favoring limited television time, more time spent in nature and on activities that bring the family together – such as games and puzzles. Many companies are producing/marketing toys that meet the particular preferences of the green/natural parent who is looking for toys that are not only safe, but that illicit more “pretend play” on the child’s part, helping them explore their own interests and creativity. These companies include [Natural Pod](#), [Under the Nile](#), [Plan](#) and [HABA](#).

While the most passionate devotees of natural parenting certainly don’t represent the mainstream, we believe that the more staunch followers of the natural parenting movement are informing a trend that is influencing many mothers to explore ways to connect more organically with their children. This was evident in the conversations observed during this study, as well as in national reports like one released by the CDC ⁶ last year showing a dramatic rise in the number of women initiating breastfeeding. Other indicators: the rise in popularity of cloth diapering, baby-wearing and a favoring of more basic toys; for example, those crafted of wood. More evidence of this trend entering the mainstream is the re-emergence of these types of toys on the shelves of big box stores, including Wal-Mart, which offers a line of wooden toys from Mommy and Me.

“Simple Moms” are defined by **Tsh Oxenreider**, founder of **SimpleMom.net** as “home managers who yearn for simplicity in their lives.” This definition could easily be expanded to encompass the mothering philosophy of our “Simple Living” mothers. These are women who, like the Natural Parenting enthusiasts, are looking for means to raise their children in a more holistic way that focuses on family and relationships rather than possessions, and on reducing consumption as part of the equation.

As a post by **Megan Teitz** at **SimpleMom.net** writes: “... We are constantly cutting back on the number of toys and parts and pieces that are so often underfoot in our home. The approaching holiday season has me thinking about how we can celebrate through giving, without increasing the volume of stuff in our home....” ⁷

This parenting philosophy strongly incorporates green values, as is illustrated in the approach to food, which emphasizes home-made, organic meals and locavore tendencies; and in the focus on minimalist consumption in general.

⁶ http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/data/report_card.htm

⁷ <http://simplemom.net/10-clutter-free-gift-ideas-for-kids/>

Green and Frugal Moms

When considering the Green and Frugal moms, the mantra is “living within ones means,” as is the concept of contentment and to using one’s own judgment to determine the value of products one acquires. There is a noted disdain for buying into trends. For example, while the Green and Frugal Moms, like the Super Greens and Eco-Moderates, are likely to cloth diaper their children for economic as well as green motivations, they would be less susceptible to the appeal of products such as G Diapers, which have gained popularity among design savvy, cloth diapering moms (that include celebrity fans such as Julia Roberts).

While these mothers are focused strongly on saving money as well as the environmental impact of the product, they should not be confused with bargain shoppers who prioritize price over quality. While eating local and buying from farmer’s markets is recognized as coming at a higher price than buying from box stores and supermarket chains, these mothers often see eating local as a commitment worth making for the environmental benefits, as well as the benefits to the local economy. And, they often compensate for the cost by scrutinizing all family spending and eliminating other expenses; for example, working to further reduce energy expenses in the home – washing clothes in cold water, turning their thermostats up or down depending on the season.

While there is a wide-spread understanding within this set that limiting ones purchases is good for one’s personal economy as well as for the environment, this doesn’t mean that the same degree of stringent eco-guidelines is as commonly considered before making a purchase.

A considerable amount of value is given to being fastidious about repairs, to being persistent about contacting companies when a product breaks.

“I think if a few more of us lived below our means, we might be able to fix it, too. Make stuff - don’t just buy stuff. Consider your home a haven - not an investment to be “flipped” in the near future. Pay a little more for your goods and services to put your neighbor back to work - and maybe he or she will do the same for you.”

Later, in the same post: “In the meantime what it pays to remember is this: you should always define yourself not by what you have in your life – but who.”⁸

The Green and Frugal Moms place more emphasis on living within ones means, reducing consumption as much to save money as to be kind to the environment.

⁸ <http://blog.imperfectparent.com/2009/07/22/frugal-to-a-fault/>

What does all this mean for companies and their brands?

This report imparts the importance of organizations understanding the different mindsets of green moms, and the influence the Super Greens and Eco-Moderates hold as industry watchdogs. A great many are well informed and researched, and their circles of influence reach beyond the green cosm of pundits, experts, and scientists into a broader community of mainstream moms.

And they are sharing their opinions – loudly – about companies, products and brands.

According to the Global Green Brands study, which was released in July 2009, the 10 green brands as ranked by US consumers were: [Clorox Green Works](#), [Burt's Bees](#), [Tom's of Maine](#), [S.C. Johnson & Son](#), [Toyota](#), [P&G](#), [Wal-Mart](#), [Ikea](#), [Disney](#) and [Dove](#).

We thought it would be interesting to look briefly at how a few of these brands are discussed among our profiled green moms. Here's what we found. Burt's Bees and Tom's of Maine have long been favorites of the eco-concerned. Not surprisingly, the two brands enjoy strong and favorable recognition among them.

The same is not true for Clorox Green Works, S.C. Johnson & Son and Wal-Mart. This said, one might be surprised at the reactions among not just the Mainstream Greens, but the Super Greens, to these three companies and their recent efforts to green their products and organizations.

Noteworthy is the openness of the more devoted greens to the concept of more eco-friendly cleaning products by the same company that produces Clorox Bleach, one of the most often referenced "toxic chemicals" inside the home. Even those mothers in our study who claimed to use their own natural cleaning agents in their homes gave the products positive reviews and endorsements. They were willing to overlook the relationship between the products and the mother company because Clorox Green Works offers a "needed" alternative that is safe, effective and affordable. While Seventh Generation enjoys strong and favorable brand recognition among green mothers, the products were considered to be cost prohibitive for many families striving to make greener choices. The core criticism related to Clorox Green Works pertained to the lack of availability of in-store refill containers, a seemingly sizable gaff considering the emphasis placed on packaging within the green community.

As S.C. Johnson & Son takes steps to phase out the use of phthalates in its products and to disclose product ingredients, green moms are commending the company's actions – the Super Greens largely included; this is with full knowledge that this is the same company that produces Windex. Though not opposed as strongly as Bleach, [Windex](#) is often also on the hit list of cleaning agents that should be eliminated from the home by more staunch green moms.

And lastly, consider [Wal-Mart](#), a company that has faced enormous criticism from environmentalists for a plethora of reasons (human rights and quality/safety concerns over products produced in China and the company's negative impact on local economies among the most often cited). Though many mothers are still skeptical of the company's actions, a careful nod of approval is being extended by many to the big box store for its recent efforts to develop sustainability standards and eco-labeling for everything the store sells, and for stocking more "green" products. A post titled *Wal-Mart is about to change the way we go shopping* by **Jenn Savedge** of the **Green Parent** succinctly summarizes the attitude of many very committed green mothers who are leery, but at the same time hopeful, of the positive impact this global behemoth's actions could precipitate, "As the world's largest retailer, Wal-Mart has earned quite a reputation for their rock-bottom price tags (and the questionable strategies they use to attain those prices.) But in the future, those price tags may also be accompanied by another label... a green label that gives consumers information about the product's carbon footprint... the energy and water used to create it, and the pollution left in its wake.

Wal-Mart is apparently on a mission to determine the social and environmental impact of every item it puts on its shelves. And it has recruited scholars, suppliers, and environmental groups to help it create an electronic indexing system to do that. Their goal is to create a universal rating system over the next 5 years that scores products based on how environmentally and socially sustainable they are. And down the road they hope that other retailers will adopt their green labeling system as well.

"We have to change how we make and sell products. We have to make consumption itself smarter and sustainable," Michael T. Duke, Wal-Mart's president and chief executive, told about 1,500 of the company's suppliers and employees on Thursday at a "sustainability meeting."

*I know, I know, it seems a little scary that Wal-Mart may control the future of green labeling. The potential for greenwashing is astronomical But so is the potential that something incredibly good could come out of this. Let's face it, nobody else is doing it... and as the mega-giant of world consumption, Wal-Mart is about the only company that could pull this off."*⁹



⁹ <http://www.thegreenparent.com/2009/07/17/wal-mart-to-add-green-label-to-products/>



Closing

Because this is an emerging market, the conversations and motivations are complex. By observing through the online windows into their homes and their lives, it is apparent that the size and influence of this online population of green moms is strengthening. The insights that can be gained from them are enormous, and wide-ranging. Important to remember, too, is that many of these green moms are serving as thought leaders for larger populations and as industry watchdogs. Indeed, a new business imperative will require that companies continue to listen to what these women are saying, and to adapt to the changing needs of a society increasingly concerned with environmental issues.

About The Social Studies Group

The Social Studies Group (www.socialstudiesgroup.com) is a social media research firm that provides deep analyses of social media conversations to help companies better understand their customers, competitors, markets and industries. An area of specialization involves identifying and analyzing niche communities online (Green Moms in the case of this report), creating “universes” that can be monitored and analyzed over time.

Among the companies SSG has provided research for are Blue Bunny, Cabot Cheese, Cambria Suites and Highlights. SSG is led by partners Wendy Goldman Scherer and Angela Walseng, who served as lead author on this report.

Andrea Learned

Andrea Learned, co-author of *Don't Think Pink: What Really Makes Women Buy – And How To Increase Your Share of This Crucial Market* (AMACOM, 2004), is an internationally respected gender and consumer behavior expert. Andrea's current research compares the buying behaviors of female consumers with the behaviors of all sustainable, “green” or values-based consumers. In addition to consulting and speaking on how brand sustainability connects with consumers, Andrea contributes to HuffingtonPost.com, provides sustainability commentary for Vermont Public Radio, and writes for her own blog, [Learned on Women](http://www.learnedonwomen.com).

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For more information about the methodology, or to talk about how your product, brand or industry might look in this or other custom social universe, please contact Wendy Goldman Scherer.