



# The Green Mom Eco-cosm Revisited

A SURVEY OF GREEN MOMS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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## ...FAMILY IS THE SOURCE OF THEIR ACTIVISM... IT IS HERE THEIR PASSION COMES TO LIFE; WHERE THE DEFINITION OF "LIVING GREEN" RESIDES...

The green awakening that has occurred in the U.S. in recent years has brought many environmental issues to the forefront of mainstream consciousness. But it has also led to many puzzling questions as the movement has taken hold at varying degrees within different pockets of the population. Suffice it to say, awareness does not equal commitment.

Earlier this year, the Social Studies Group released a report that looked specifically at green moms and provided insights into what "being green" and making "green choices" actually means for these women. By the time the report was released in January of 2010, our research team had spent hundreds of hours immersed in the study of these women. Though they may not be described as "mainstream," a strong argument can be made that they are gradually affecting a cultural change in parenting in the U.S.

The initial study revealed some fascinating insights. We uncovered very distinct profiles and learned there isn't one ironclad definition of "being green." This summer, we revisited many of these same women, this time via an in-depth survey, to explore further some of the most compelling findings from the first report.

### Introduction

Conversations about green living are multifaceted. While the implications of climate legislation may be too remote for most mainstream Americans to engage in emotionally, the same cannot be said of more tangible issues that hit closer to home.

Unlike any other time in our history, it is impossible to go through a day without hearing about or giving some thought to the environment. It is now a major part of political discussions; there are more civic and societal calls to action; the marketplace is changing to accommodate this shift in focus; and there is a greater sense that those around us are reevaluating their behaviors and choices.

Given all of this "green" progress, it was most interesting to find for the majority of women we researched, arguably some of the loudest and most insistent voices for environmental change, it is the family – and not the environment – that is the primary motivator for "going green."

For the women we researched, family is not just the motivation for their green lifestyles, it is the milieu in which they practice their activism.

It is here their passion comes to life; where the definition of "living green" resides...in what they feed their families, how they clothe their children, how they get from point A to point B.

And it is through their personal stories, the common ground, where the green moms' message is connecting with their mainstream counterparts. This is a vigilant, ardent, curious and well-educated community with a particularly sharp focus on the micro-aspects of environmentalism that relate directly and immediately to families. Herein lies a pivotal point where the message of environmentalism gains crossover appeal.

Understand: These women are a powerful force edging environmentalism into the homes of mainstream Americans.

### Our Approach

This report is the second to be released by The Social Studies Group on the subject of Green Moms; it is a companion to the January 2010 report "*The Green Mom Eco-cosm: A Social Study into their Motivations, Convictions and Influences.*" In this second exploration of the Green Moms' cosm, we revisit some of the topics examined in the first study, but this time, we engaged directly with the women who we first studied through an observational netnography approach.

For this report, we contacted the same 300 women we observed in the first report and asked them to participate in a direct survey. Of the 300 people contacted, we received responses from nearly 50% (149/300). In the event of incomplete surveys, we reported the actual number of respondents for specific questions.

## The Green Moment

Many green moms speak about the greening of their lives as an ongoing journey, a gradual evolution as they accept greater responsibility for their environment and give more thought to the effects environmental toxins have on them and their families. We explored this subject in our previous report, and in that report we noted how the origins of this journey have a significant impact on a person's overall environmental perspective and approach to being green. Given the significance of that launching point, we explored this subject in greater depth.

### Tipping Point

For many green moms there's a single event or tipping point – a "green moment" – where living responsibly takes on greater urgency and serves as a starting off point for the green journey. In this survey, we delved into that green moment and its repercussions. We discovered five types of green moments. The most common green moment for these environmentally conscious women was (1) becoming a mom – 54%. The other types of green moments, in order of commonality, are (2) an educational experience – 21%, (3) family illness – 10%, (4) personal illness – 7%, and (5) a brush with activism – 7%.

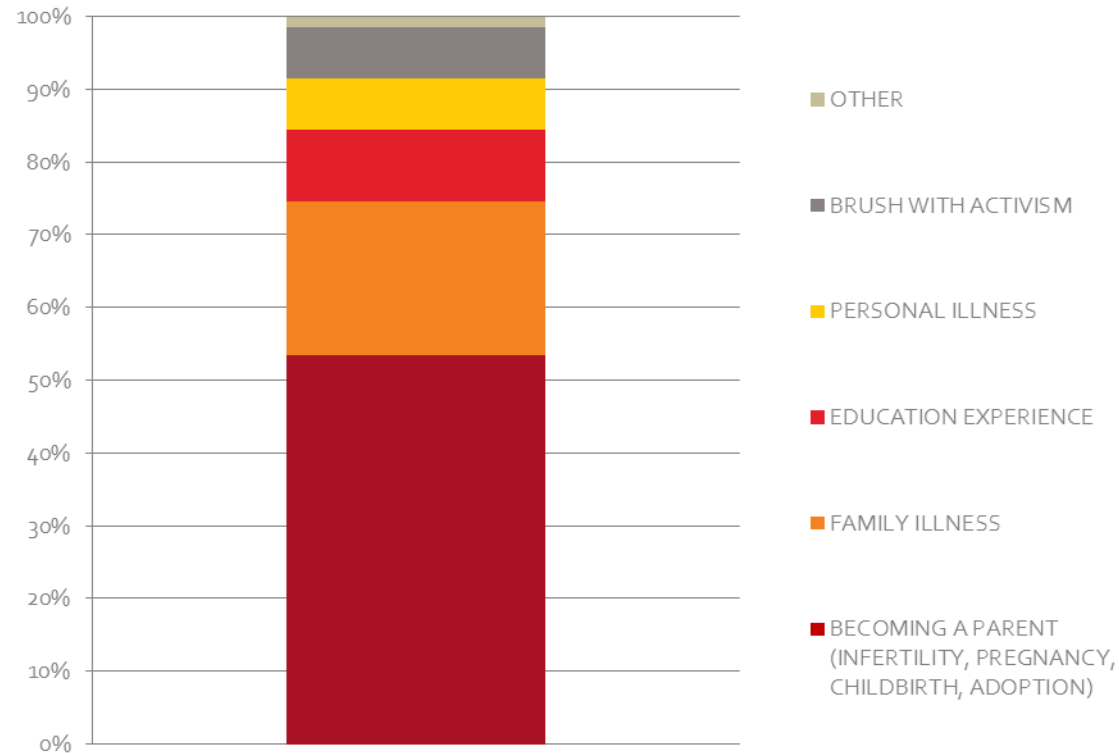
This green moment has a lasting impact on the nature of a person's environmental behaviors.

Conversely, for some of our respondents, not having one specific green moment was just as descriptive of their green living. In our survey, those who did not mention a specific green moment tended to be more holistically environmental, with a higher percentage taking on lifestyle environmental behaviors such as vegetarianism (30% v. 14%), growing their own foods (90% v. 78%), and reducing carbon emissions (88% v. 70%).

"MY CONSCIOUSNESS CHANGED A GREAT DEAL WHEN I BECAME A PARENT. THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE BLESSED WITH CHILDREN CAN RELATE – SUDDENLY EVERY ELECTRICAL OUTLET, EVERY STRANGE CHEMICAL SMELL, EVERY DOG RUNNING DOWN THE SIDEWALK GIVES YOU PAUSE: COULD THIS HARM MY CHILD? THAT PRECIOUS, HELPLESS LIFE ENTRUSTED TO YOU TRULY CHANGES THE WAY YOU SEE THE WORLD."

<http://www.kitchenstewardship.com/2009/07/16/on-conscious-thought-a-mary-and-martha-moment/>

**Figure 1: The Experiences that Drove Mom Bloggers to be Green**





Omnipresence in Social Media

The social dimension of the Internet has been thoroughly embraced by eco-conscious moms, who use the full range of social media channels to converse, spread ideas, comment, and share information.

Engaged

In their online social-media engagement, green moms are wide ranging and very active. The vast majority of the women we spoke with contribute to the online conversation in many ways that extend beyond their own blogs, including Facebook (83%), Twitter (80%), and commenting on other websites and blogs (68%).

The level of dialogue in this community is significant as ideas spread rapidly from one person to the entire community across multiple channels and common opinions are formed and cemented relating to products, behaviors, and general beliefs.

In the sample influence maps shown here, it's possible to see how a single environmentally conscientious mom uses multiple social media channels to reach a wide network on a variety of personal and environmental subjects.

Figure 2: Tracks Throughout Social Media

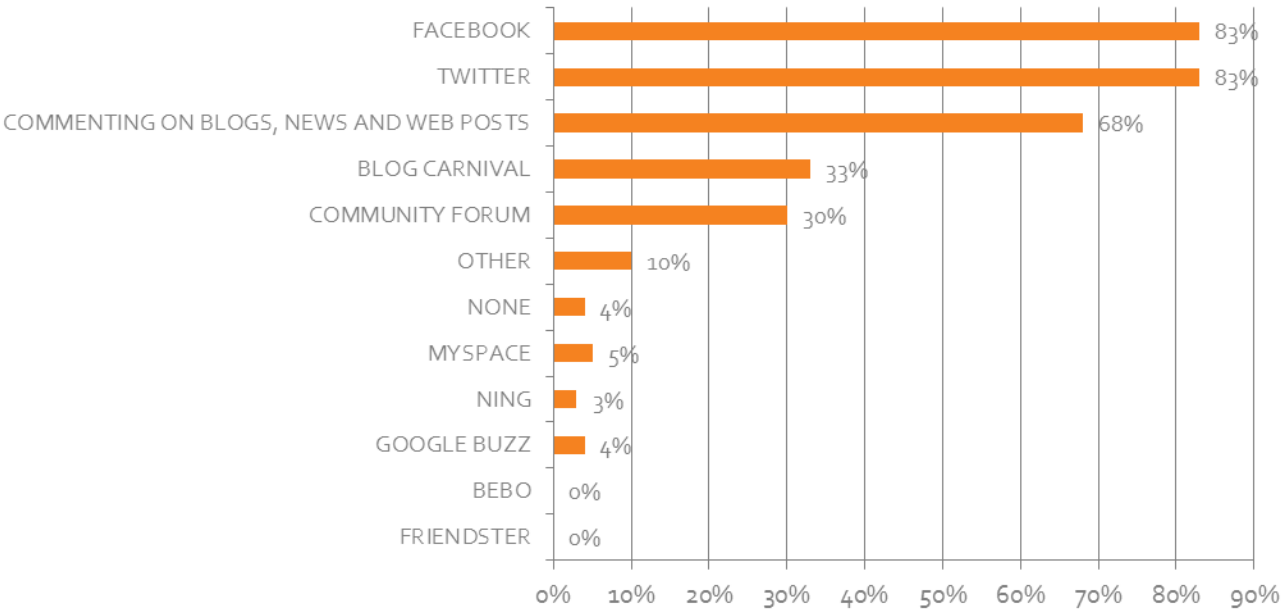
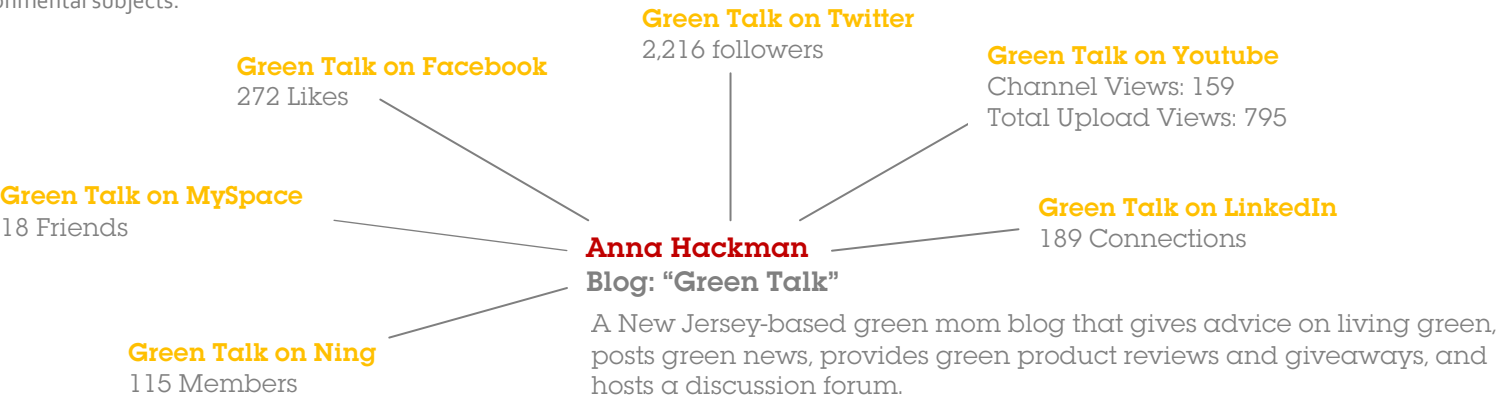


Figure 3: Sample Influence Map for Anna Hackman



## The Activism of Buying Green

**"WE BELIEVE THAT THE FASTEST, EASIEST, AND MOST DIRECT ROUTE TO A CLEAN AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT IS TO CONSUME LESS, THEN SHIFT OUR SPENDING TO ENVIRONMENTALLY-SAFE, SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES..."**

<http://www.biggreenpurse.com>

For this survey, we wanted to look more closely at how green moms embrace the activist dimension of environmentalism in their blogs and other social media communications, and how they see themselves as promoting being green. There is almost universal engagement in a number of green behaviors, a great number of which are publicly discussed in the blog posts.

There was far more reticence to engage publicly in overt political and environmental activism. While 91% of respondents consider environmental factors in their voting decisions, only 24% discuss this on their blog.

Slightly less (78%) follow environmental politics, but only 30% blog about this. Instead, most eco-conscious moms show a distinct preference for engaging with others at a personal level, especially when it comes to making purchasing decisions.

For example, over 80% of eco-conscious moms blog about buying local, substituting green

products, buying used, and buying organic; and over 90% of respondents personally engage in each of these activities.

When asked about their motivation to blog, the strongest reasons for blogging were (1)

community building, (2) documenting their journey, and (3) finding support for their own green efforts. What's evident from these numbers is a large majority of environmentally conscientious moms see individual actions and pocketbook decisions as the primary paths to green activism. This preference is a key part of bringing environmental behaviors and thought to a more mainstream audience, while also circumventing potentially divisive political discussions.

**Figure 4: Percentage of Green Moms Blogging AND Participating in Certain "Green" Behaviors Compared to the Percentage Participating Only**



## Educational Attainment and Living Green

“SINCE BECOMING A MAMA, MY LIFE HAS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY. I WENT FROM CLERKING FOR A FEDERAL JUDGE TO STAYING AT HOME WITH OUR SON KIERAN. MY INTENSE LOVE OF EDUCATION AND THE LAW HAS MORPHED INTO A FASCINATION WITH RESEARCHING AND WRITING ABOUT PARENTING.”

<http://codenamemama.com/>

Based on the discourse we observed in our initial study of green moms, who bring a significant amount of thought and research to everything from their daily habits to purchasing decisions, we expected these eco-conscious women to be a very well educated group. This is indeed true. In our survey of green mom bloggers, we found an impressive 79% had a bachelor's degree; 37% of our respondents had some amount of post-graduate education.

### Conscious Motherhood

One might expect higher educational experience would translate to greater likelihood of having a career outside of the home. That traditional view of employment and also its relationship to education does not hold up in our results. Respondents to our survey showed a high rate of environmentally-minded women choosing to remain in the home rather than leave the home for work regardless of educational attainment.

Of those we surveyed, 84% of women holding less than a bachelor's degree chose not to leave the home for work, preferring to work from home or focus solely on taking care of their families. The number remains high for those with higher educational attainment. More than 68% of respondents with a bachelor's degree or some level of post-graduate study chose not to work outside the home.

This doesn't mean these women are giving up careers. More than 65% of respondents work for pay; however, many are choosing to work from home in flexible careers that allow them to balance their work and family obligations.

Figure 5: Proportion Working Outside of Home by Educational Experience

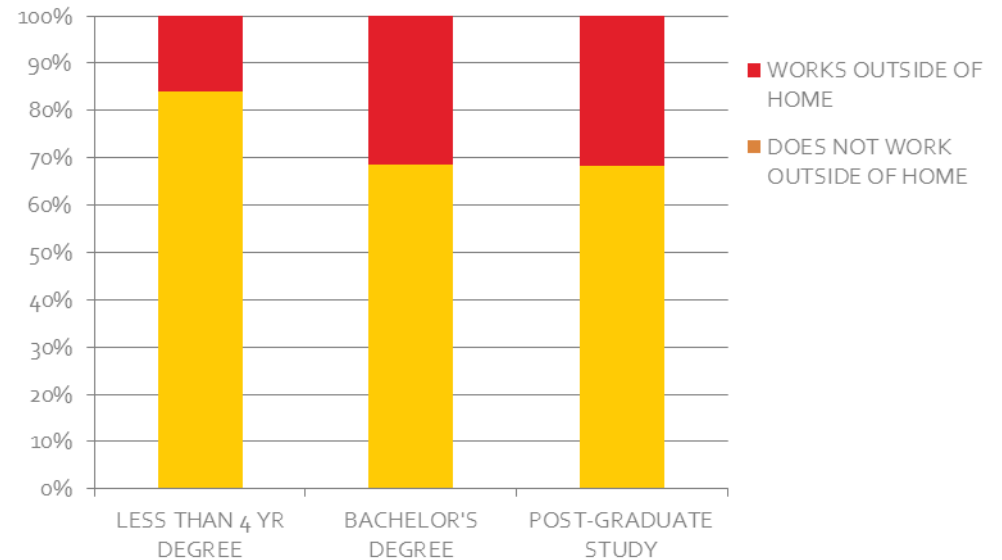
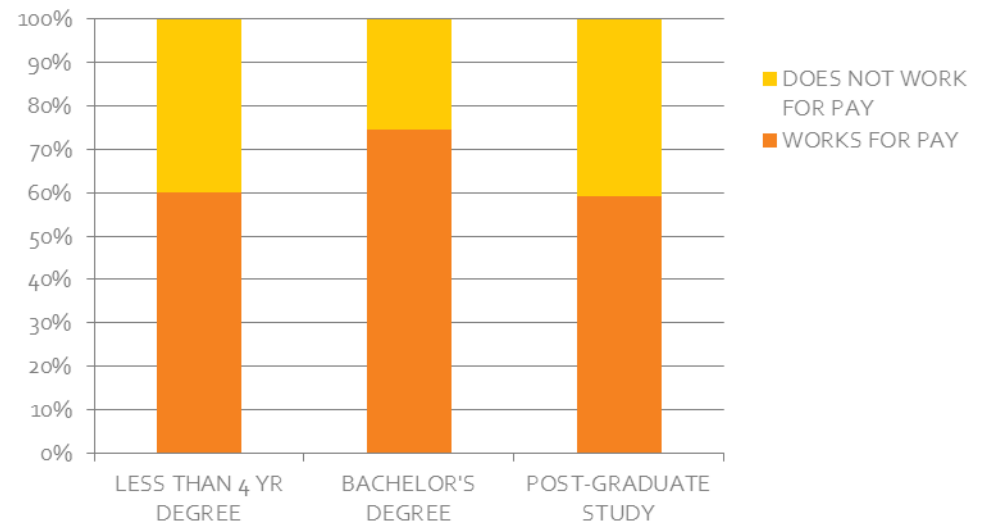


Figure 6: Proportion Working for Pay by Educational Experience



Frugality and Buying Green  
"IT IS IMPORTANT TO ME TO BUY ORGANIC, UPCYCLED, RECLAIMED, AND OTHERWISE ECO-FRIENDLY PRODUCTS. BUT. I VOW NOT TO PUT THINGS OVER THE HEALTH OF HER WORLD."

<http://www.almostallthetruth.com/2010/07/top-ten-eco-friendly-fantasy-second-birthday-gifts/>

Being green is seldom associated with being budget conscious. Organic produce can cost more than non-organic; energy saving light bulbs have a higher initial price, at least, than standard bulbs; and handmade products tend to be more

expensive than mass produced, conventional goods imported to the United States from other countries.

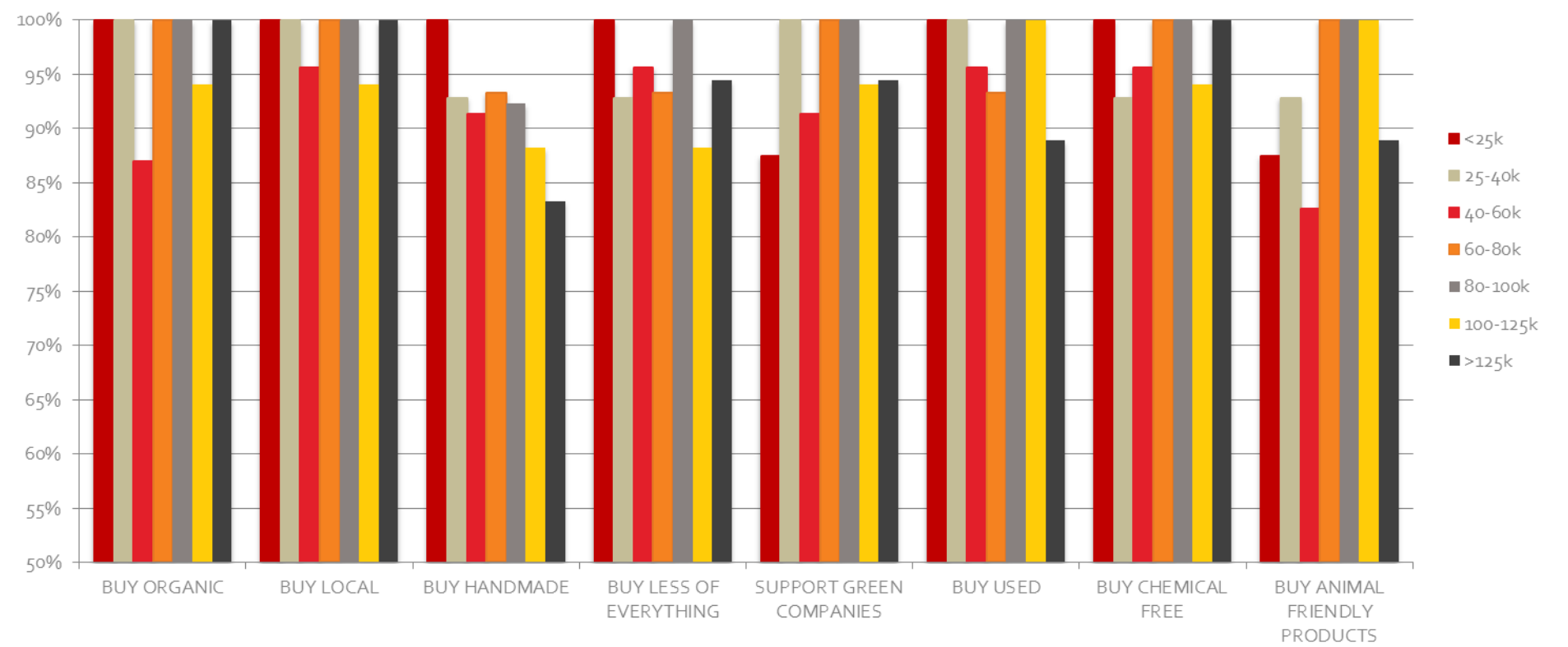
Given the expense associated with a green lifestyle, it is notable that for the green moms surveyed in this report, there is little correlation between income and a number of behaviors often associated with adding cost.

Regardless of income, respondents were equally likely to buy organic, buy local, seek out alternative energy sources, buy green toys, and choose greener transportation sources.

Respondents who identified themselves in lower income brackets were more likely to minimize their overall purchasing than give up buying more costly, but environmentally safe products.

Our results illustrated that many eco-conscious moms have a more nuanced view of living frugally than simply buying products at a lower price. Frugality, for these moms, is a mindset that relates to preserving the resources of the world and not just their pocketbooks.

Figure 7: Green Purchasing Decisions as they Correlate to Income



## Conclusion

In this follow-up exploration of the green mom segment, we focused on the nature of the population's specific environmental behaviors and how those behaviors are affected by contextual factors, from education to the motivation to live a more environmentally conscientious lifestyle. While in the previous study, we learned how people engage in the dialogue about environmental action; in this study, we examined how this dialogue was backed up by personal action.

These women are greener in their own lives than their online presence would lead you to believe. For nearly every behavior measured, the number of people talking about it was less than the number of people actually doing it. Instead of seeing this as a limitation, we see it as one of this cosm's greatest strengths. That is, the range of conversation we found should not be considered fixed. There is a broad behavioral foundation to support conversations that include a wider selection of issues and behaviors going forward. Based on what has already happened in this cosm, we expect that as these discussions increase in scope and scale, the very ideas, adoption and normalization of more green behaviors will extend into the lifestyles of mainstream families.

This is an essential element of how eco-consciousness is becoming more pervasive in mainstream culture; its movement is driven by public discussion of the most everyday tasks. Because the back and forth with readers of these blogs is usually framed in practical terms of how to adopt a greener lifestyle, it seems that this dialogue is integral to the adoption of green behaviors by a broader audience, mainstream or otherwise. And what this research further showed is that these daily choices aren't reserved exclusively for those who can afford to pay the higher costs associated with being green. When it came to buying behaviors, we found a focus on being green had no correlation to income, and despite the higher costs associated with green products, the drive to live responsibly outranked pocketbook concerns.

Additionally, **the role of mothers has become more sophisticated as more and more women are choosing, regardless of education level, to spend time with their families and to seek out flexible ways to manage their career and their homes.** All this has enormous implications for companies, policy makers, and interest groups trying to relate to this more engaged population. The role of producer has become loaded with political and environmental implications.

Those companies that understand their products are the starting off point for many people in their green journeys, and that they are a partner in this lifelong process, have an opportunity to develop a new level of loyalty with a rapidly growing, well-educated, and increasingly vocal population. Those companies that ignore this demand risk being passed over in favor of companies that have decided to share the responsibility for becoming green.



ABOUT THE SOCIAL STUDIES GROUP

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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.**

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