



**Mommy Wars:
Real Issue or Media Myth?**

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Abstract

- We asked Hunch.com users about a variety of attitudes and behaviors. We then took a deeper look at women with children in the Hunch community, dividing these moms into groups (Mainstream vs. Unique, Traditional vs. Progressive, Straight Arrows vs. Rule Benders) based on specific attitudes and behaviors.
- We looked for areas of differentiation, exploring youth experiences, educational experience, and attitudes towards family and childcare.
- The report draws on aggregated and anonymous data from Hunch, an online recommendation site launched in June 2009.

Key findings

- Mainstream moms tend to be more insular and value family in traditional ways. Unique moms have more liberal views, are more likely to give their children original names, and put more value on "giving back."
- Traditional moms are more apt to approve of alternative educational approaches (teacher merit pay, homeschooling) to maintain student standards, but are less likely to care for contemporary content (such as Harry Potter). Progressive moms are more prolific readers and more likely to support affirmative action programs.
- Rule bending behavior in moms has little correlation to either childhood experience or parenting philosophy. In other words, just because a mom was a little on the wild side growing up doesn't mean she's more permissive or uninvolved as a parent.
- Mommyhood trumps all: Despite the presence of some differences among the sub-groups we explored, there are many areas where both groups are very similar, suggesting that a mom's basic instincts to nurture and protect her children are fairly independent of some of the unique personality traits of the mom herself.

Background – Mommy Wars in the Media

From CNN to Motherlode to Momversation, the subject of “Mommy Wars” has been one of contentious debate. When Leslie Morgan Steiner first published Mommy Wars in 1986, she presented the inner turmoil felt by mothers when making and defending their personal decisions either to stay at home with their children or to pursue their careers. In the past twenty-five years the term “Mommy Wars” has become a blanket name for conflicts between mothers making different parenting choices, ranging from breastfeeding to sleep training. In many cases these quarrels are presented as anecdotal experiences, without much data on attitudinal differences between proponents of different parenting styles.

In this study we’ve approached the “Mommy Wars” phenomenon from an attitudinal perspective, examining differences in family values, educational philosophies, and parenting practices within different types of mothers. The question is whether mothers with distinct attitudes towards uniqueness, generational standards, and rules will exhibit similar distinctions regarding their attitudes about family, education, and parenting.

Introduction to Hunch

Hunch is a website which uses multiple-choice questions to provide customized recommendations, whether it's where to send a child to summer camp, what kind of camera to buy, where to go on vacation, or more than 6,000 other topics.

To arrive at a customized recommendation for each user, Hunch asks both "topic-specific" questions (In which region would you prefer this camp to be located? Would you prefer a camp offering coed sessions?) and also more general/personality-based questions (What’s your gender?, Have you ever changed a spark plug?, What types of books do you like to read?) which are called “Teach Hunch About You” (THAY) questions.

There are more than 1,500 THAY questions in Hunch's question pool, and more than 44 million of them have been answered since Hunch's 2009 launch. THAYs help Hunch get to know each user so that Hunch's recommendations are customized for each individual.

When Hunch proposes a recommendation, the site also allows users to provide feedback about whether they like the recommendation or not. This ‘trains’ Hunch to associate the feedback with all other questions the user answered. As a by-product of all the questions being answered on Hunch to receive good recommendations, the response data is available for analysis in an aggregated and anonymous form. Hunch frequently creates blog entries and reports about interesting correlations using this data.

Methodology and Baseline

The data in this report relies primarily on "THAY to THAY" correlations (e.g. how parenting opinions relate to parenting behavior). In a few cases, the report explores "THAY to RESULT" correlations (e.g. the correlation between someone's stated behavior and what names they like for a child).

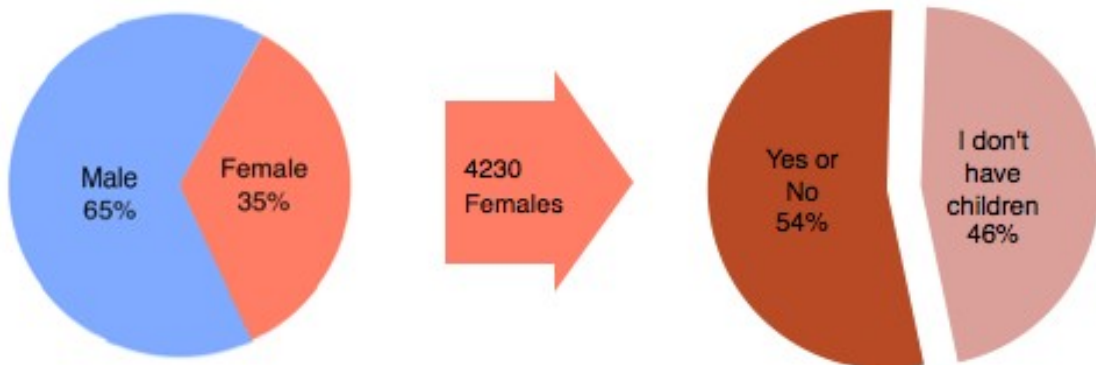
About 150,000 Hunch users have answered a question about their gender. Of these, 4,230 women stated also their attitude towards homeschooling, which yielded the following responses:

Are you male or female?

- > Male
- > Female

Are you homeschooling your children?

- > Yes
- > No
- > I don't have children



For the purposes of our analysis, we've defined the subset of 2,285 women who answered yes or no to the homeschooling question as mothers. We then examined different attitudes and behaviors within mothers, separated into three different comparison groups: Mainstream vs. Unique, Traditionalists vs. Progressives, and Straight Arrows vs. Rule Benders. Our hypothesis was that our analysis groups would settle into analogous patterns of attitudes, behaviors, and experiences regarding parenting and education.

Mainstream Moms vs. Unique Moms

Mainstream moms tend to be more insular and value family in more traditional ways.

We used two different questions to gauge the Mainstream/ Unique divide in our group of moms. The first question gauged the way that moms like to be perceived and the second question gauged the way that moms tend to behave.

There is significant overlap between those moms that like to be perceived as unique and those that behave uniquely, but these are not mutually exclusive groups. While nearly 60% of moms like to be perceived as unique, only half of moms report going against the crowd. Therefore it is instructive to examine

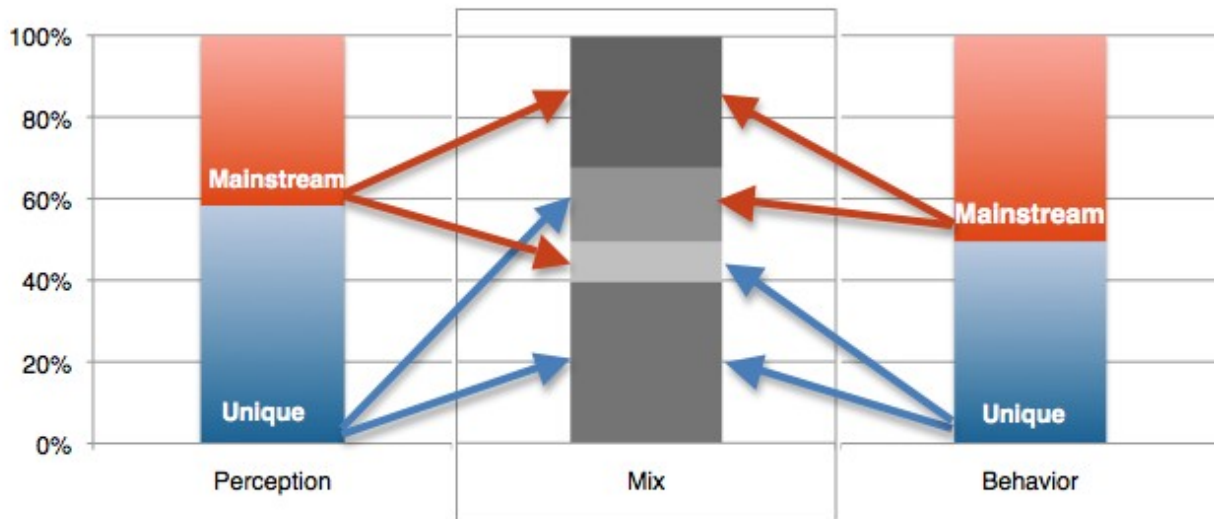
these questions independently (rather than simply treating them as a redundant proxy for one another).

Which describes you better?

- > I like to fit in and be in tune with those around me
- > I like to be perceived as unique and different to make my own mark

In general, which do you do more often?

- > Stick with everyone else
- > Go against the crowd



The contrasts between these Mainstream and Unique moms are apparent when looking at questions regarding family.

Unique moms were more likely to have experienced the death of an immediate family member sometime in their youth. Could this have been a contributing factor in shaping who they are? Uniques are also more likely to advocate equal marital status for gay couples and are significantly more likely to feel the world needs more knowledge and equality. And true to their sub-group description, they are more likely to give their child an original name.

But there are no significant differences between Mainstream and Unique moms regarding the prevalence of family nearby or the presence of a spouse or partner in the household.

Mainstream moms are more likely to feel the world needs more family values. They also put relatively more value on “building family” than Unique moms do, while Unique moms put more value on “Giving back.”

Roughly a quarter of all moms would lie to the authorities to cover for a family member, with no significant differences between Mainstream moms and Unique moms. In other words, both groups have a similar propensity to protect those close to them.

Family	Preferred Perception		Behavior	
	Mainstream	Unique	Mainstream	Unique
Did an immediate member of your family pass away before you reached the age of twenty?	(n=877)	(n=1230)	(n=1028)	(n=1008)
Yes	27%	32%*	28%	33%*
No	73%*	68%	72%*	67%
Do you live near family?	(n=581)	(n=864)	(n=698)	(n=703)
Yes, I have some family members nearby	68%	65%	67%	67%
No, my family lives elsewhere	29%	32%	31%	30%
No, I don't really have any family	2%	3%	2%	3%
Do other adults live in your household?	(n=867)	(n=1169)	(n=1008)	(n=964)
Yes, including my spouse/partner/significant other	70%	66%	68%	66%
Yes, but not a spouse/partner	16%	15%	16%	16%
No, no other adults in my household	14%	19%*	16%	18%

Family	Preferred Perception		Behavior	
	Mainstream	Unique	Mainstream	Unique
Should gay marriage be legal?	(n=864)	(n=1210)	(n=1011)	(n=998)
Yes, equal in every way to traditional marriage	63%	71%*	66%	70%*
Civil unions yes, but marriage no	23%*	19%	22%*	18%
No, we shouldn't reinforce relationships that damage traditional family values	15%*	10%	13%	12%
What do you think the world needs more of?	(n=868)	(n=1225)	(n=1023)	(n=999)
Religion	5%	4%	5%	4%
Peace	40%	40%	41%	40%
Security	3%	3%	4%	3%
Knowledge	13%	20%*	14%	20%*
Family values	27%*	16%	24%*	17%
Equality	12%	17%*	13%	17%*
Which do you most desire?	(n=867)	(n=1204)	(n=1017)	(n=985)
Obtaining wealth	32%	32%	32%	32%
Building family	50%*	39%	47%*	39%
Giving back	13%	19%*	14%	20%*
Having prestige	6%	10%*	7%	10%*
Would you be more likely to give your child a name that's:	(n=134)	(n=250)	(n=164)	(n=208)
Very original	26%	50%*	29%	49%*
Based on an existing name in our family	31%	25%	31%	24%
Fairly mainstream	43%*	26%	40%*	28%
Would you lie to the authorities to cover for a family member/ loved one?	(n=138)	(n=249)	(n=167)	(n=211)
Without a doubt	24%	26%	22%	26%
No way	6%	9%	5%	11%
It would depend on the circumstances	70%	65%	73%	64%

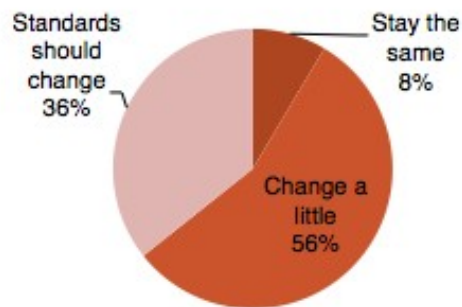
*Results significantly higher than comparison group at 95% confidence

Traditional Moms vs. Progressives

To examine the differences between moms who value tradition and moms who embrace change we used a question probing attitudes toward changing standards. The majority of the respondents took a moderate stance towards changing standards, while a third noted observing a high level of change in the world and used this as a rationalization for changing standards from generation to generation.

Do you think standards should change from generation to generation, or stay the same?

- They should stay. What worked for me will work for today’s children.
- They should change a little bit.
- It seems like everything else in this world has changed, so standards may as well, too.



We define “Traditional Moms” as the 8% who think standards should stay the same, “Moderate Moms” as the 56% saying standards should change a little, and “Progressive Moms” as the 36% who think standards may as well change like everything else has.

Traditional moms are more apt to approve of new educational concepts but are less likely to care fo contemporary content.

Traditional and Progressive moms show contrasting opinions on issues relating to contemporary education.

Awarding merit pay for teachers is a relatively new phenomenon. Though they have stated a preference for maintaining generational standards, half of Traditional moms feel it is a good idea to give merit pay to teachers, while only a quarter of Progressive moms agree with the approach.

Another alternative educational approach that has increased significantly in the past ten years (in the United States) is the prevalence of homeschooling.

Traditional moms are twice as likely to report homeschooling their children than either Moderate moms or Progressive moms, even though they are no more likely to have been homeschooled themselves.

Is the fact that Traditional Moms are more prone to embrace these alternative educational approaches a contradiction in their general philosophy that standards should “stay the same?” Actually, no. It appears that these moms likely consider student *achievement* to be the fundamental

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standard that needs to remain the same (and which they may feel is in jeopardy). Therefore they are open to progressive *methods* to help students realize a high level of achievement.

Compared to merit pay and the modern homeschooling movement, affirmative action programs in the US are relatively old (having been in place for the last fifty years). A third of Progressive moms believe in affirmative action programs, while fewer than one in five Traditional moms believe in these more established educational approaches.

There are slight variations in higher education achievement between Traditional and Progressive moms. Over a quarter of Traditional moms report having a 2-year college degree, while one in five Progressive moms report having a graduate degree below PhD. There are no significant differences in primary or secondary school experience between any of the moms on the standards spectrum.

More contrasts are seen in the attitudes these moms have towards books. One in five Traditional moms value learning most when reading books, although half of them report reading only one or fewer books per month. In addition, Traditional moms and Progressive moms have dramatic differences in attitudes towards contemporary literature. Traditional moms are fourteen times as likely to advocate removing Harry Potter from libraries compared to Progressive moms. In addition, one in five Traditional moms consider *The DaVinci Code* to be 'dime store trash'.

Progressive moms are more avid readers, with three in ten reading more than three books a month.

Educational Factors	Standards Spectrum		
	Traditional	Moderates	Progressives
How much education have you completed?	(n=180)	(n=1186)	(n=741)
Below high school	4%	2%	3%
High school diploma or GED equivalent	25%	24%	22%
2 year college degree / Associate's Degree	27%*	21%	18%
4 year college degree	28%	34%	32%
Any graduate degree below PhD	14%	17%	22%*
PhD or above	2%	2%	3%
Were you ever homeschooled?	(n=74)	(n=480)	(n=308)
Yes	8%	5%	4%
No	92%	95%	96%
Growing up, did you attend:	(n=82)	(n=584)	(n=361)
Mostly public (state-run) schools	73%	76%	77%
Mostly private (tuition-based) schools	20%	14%	11%
A combination of both	7%	9%	11%

Educational Factors	Standards Spectrum		
	Traditional	Moderates	Progressives
Is it a good idea to give merit pay to teachers?	(n=41)	(n=251)	(n=174)
Yes, it rewards good teachers	49%*	29%	25%
No, it promotes 'teaching to the test'	51%	71%*	75%*
Do you believe in affirmative action programs?	(n=79)	(n=496)	(n=315)
Yes	18%	25%	33%*
I used to, but not so much anymore	34%	40%	41%
No, I don't	48%*	35%*	27%
Are you homeschooling your children?	(n=185)	(n=1207)	(n=773)
Yes	14%*	5%	6%
No	87%	95%*	94%*
Which do you value most in a book?	(n=180)	(n=1184)	(n=754)
Engaging story	60%	64%*	58%
Learning something	20%*	12%	14%
Compelling characters	13%	17%	18%
Beautifully written prose	5%	5%	9%*
Talking about the book with other readers	2%	2%	1%
How many books do you read per month?	(n=183)	(n=1194)	(n=762)
1 or fewer	50%*	41%*	36%
Up to 3	19%	30%*	34%*
More than 3	31%	29%	30%
What is your opinion of Harry Potter?	(n=126)	(n=867)	(n=535)
We owe our appreciation to an author who has reinvigorated children's interest in reading	72%	87%*	91%*
It's sad that today's children can't find more intellectually challenging reading to enjoy	14%*	10%	8%
This witchcraft trash is blasphemous and should be removed from school libraries	14%*	4%*	1%

Educational Factors	Standards Spectrum		
	Traditional	Moderates	Progressives
What is your opinion about the Da Vinci Code?	(n=180)	(n=1189)	(n=755)
Thought provoking and daring in its ability to challenge long-accepted norms	16%	25%*	25%*
A suspense-filled page turner, but come on...it's not exactly Shakespeare	29%	38%*	43%*
This is dime store trash, and Dan Brown should be ashamed of what he's written about established religious beliefs	19%*	5%	4%
Not sure...haven't read it	36%*	32%	28%

*Results significantly higher than comparison group at 95% confidence

Straight Arrow vs. Rule Benders

We looked at two different questions to compare Straight Arrow moms to Rule Bender moms. The first is a question about declaring contraband to a customs officer and the second asks about past history in using a fake ID.

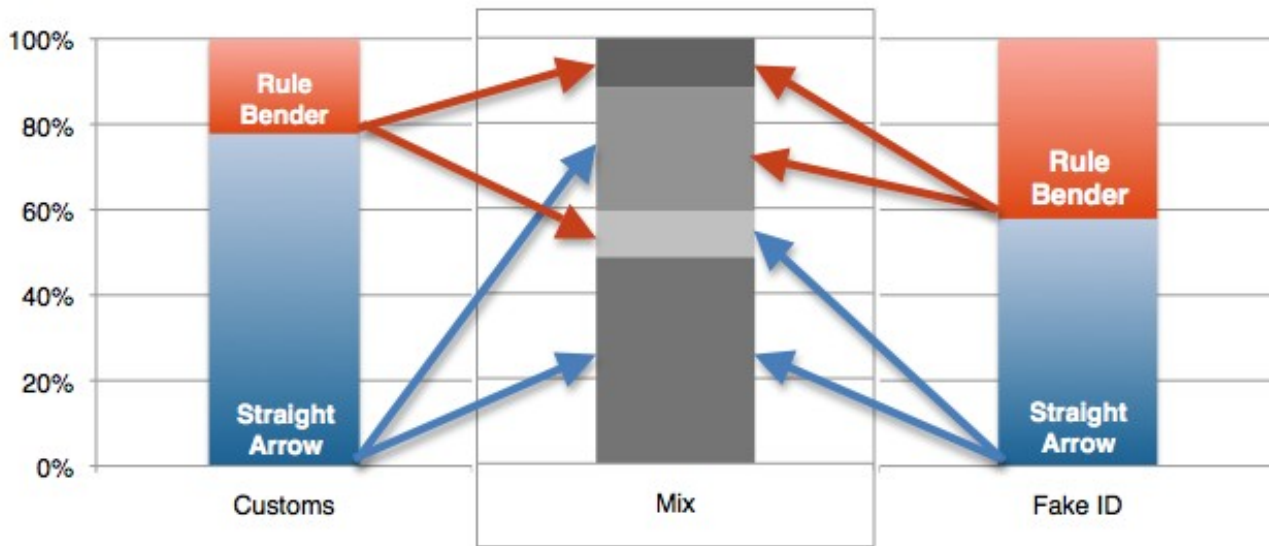
The majority of the moms we examined reported abiding by the laws in question, and there was a bit of overlap in rule bending behavior.

Have you ever not declared something to a Customs officer that would have gotten you in real trouble if it had been found?

- > Yes
- > No

Did you ever use a fake ID to try to do something you weren't legally old enough to do?

- > Maybe...just maybe
- > Nope



There are very few differences in reported parenting experience, philosophy, or behavior when comparing Straight Arrow moms and Rule Bender moms.

There are no significant differences in discipline received as a child or strictness of parenting. Moms who have used a fake ID were significantly more likely to report being allowed to get muddy as a child, and also were slightly more likely to report having parents who spent *more* time with them than other kids' parents did.

Straight Arrow moms are no more likely to prepare meals at home or regularly cook for children under 12 than their Rule Bender counterparts, although Straight Arrow moms are more likely to have a moment of silence or prayer before meals.

Three in five of all of these moms report being 'baby people,' and there are no meaningful differences between these moms when it comes to their philosophies of childhood experience.

Rule breaking behavior in moms has little correlation to either childhood experience or parenting philosophy

Moms who have used a Fake ID are more likely to think that children should run free, with moms who haven't used a Fake ID 33% more likely to think that children should be seen and not heard.

The takeaway? Rule-bending behavior in moms seems neither a consequence of their own upbringing nor something they reflect in their own approach to parenting. A mom's fundamental instinct to nurture and care for her children seems independent of whether she is sometimes a bit rebellious herself.

Parenting	Customs		Fake ID	
	Rule Bender	Straight Arrow	Rule Bender	Straight Arrow
What kind of punishment did you receive as a child?	(n=80)	(n=259)	(n=131)	(n=206)
Spanking/hitting	41%	34%	37%	35%
Yelling/arguing	24%	26%	26%	25%
Verbal Reprimands	24%	28%	27%	28%
Gentle guidance	4%	5%	5%	4%
I wasn't really punished at all	8%	7%	5%	7%
How much time did your parents spend with you?	(n=248)	(n=873)	(n=914)	(n=1254)
Probably somewhat less than other kids' parents	42%	42%	39%	43%
Probably about the same as other kids' parents	28%	30%	31%	31%
Probably somewhat more than other kids' parents	30%	29%	30%*	26%
Were you allowed to get muddy?	(n=116)	(n=369)	(n=196)	(n=291)
No, I would get in trouble for messing up my clothes.	19%	14%	13%	17%
Only on rare occasions.	41%	46%	41%	48%
Definitely. One time they had to hose me off	41%	40%	46%*	35%
Would you say your upbringing was more...	(n=249)	(n=867)	(n=504)	(n=728)
Strict	36%	38%	35%	40%
Anything goes	8%	8%	9%	7%
Somewhere in between	56%	53%	56%	53%
Which saying better describes your philosophy?	(n=247)	(n=859)	(n=779)	(n=1079)
Childhood is to be enjoyed.	48%	49%	47%	48%
It's never too soon to learn positive life lessons.	52%	51%	53%	52%
Do you think children should be...	(n=198)	(n=678)	(n=359)	(n=525)
They should be seen, not heard	28%	25%	21%	28%*
They should run free	72%	75%	79%*	72%
Are you a 'baby person'?	(n=246)	(n=840)	(n=568)	(n=788)
Yes	62%	62%	61%	62%
No	38%	38%	39%	38%

Parenting	Customs		Fake ID	
	Rule Bender	Straight Arrow	Rule Bender	Straight Arrow
Do you eat more meals...	(n=257)	(n=908)	(n=923)	(n=1280)
Prepared at home	79%	78%	75%	78%
From restaurants	21%	22%	25%	22%
How often do you cook for children <12?	(n=251)	(n=874)	(n=718)	(n=1009)
Everyday	40%	41%	44%	41%
Occasionally	22%	20%	21%	21%
Never	38%	39%	36%	38%
Do you have a moment of silence at meals?	(n=243)	(n=839)	(n=442)	(n=649)
Yes, often or always	7%	15%*	11%	15%*
Only on special occasions or at family get-togethers	21%	30%*	27%	28%
No, rarely or never	71%*	55%	62%	56.00%

Summary and Conclusions

The “Mommy Wars” debate is often framed around polarizing, hot-button issues pertaining to family, education, and parenting. But we found that while there are some notable differences among different types of moms, there are also many similarities.

Differences:

- Mainstream moms tend to be more insular and value family in traditional ways. Unique moms have more liberal views, are more likely to give their children original names, and put more value on “giving back.”
- Traditional moms are more apt to approve of new educational concepts to maintain student standards, but are less likely to care for contemporary content (such as Harry Potter). Progressive moms are more prolific readers and more likely to support affirmative action programs.
- Rule bending behavior in moms has little correlation to either childhood experience or parenting philosophy. In other words, just because a mom was a little on the wild side growing up doesn’t mean she’s more permissive or uninvolved as a parent.

Similarities:

- Despite the presence of some differences among the sub-groups we explored, there are many areas where both groups are very similar, suggesting that a mom’s basic instincts to

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nurture and protect her children are fairly independent of some of the unique personality traits of the mom herself.

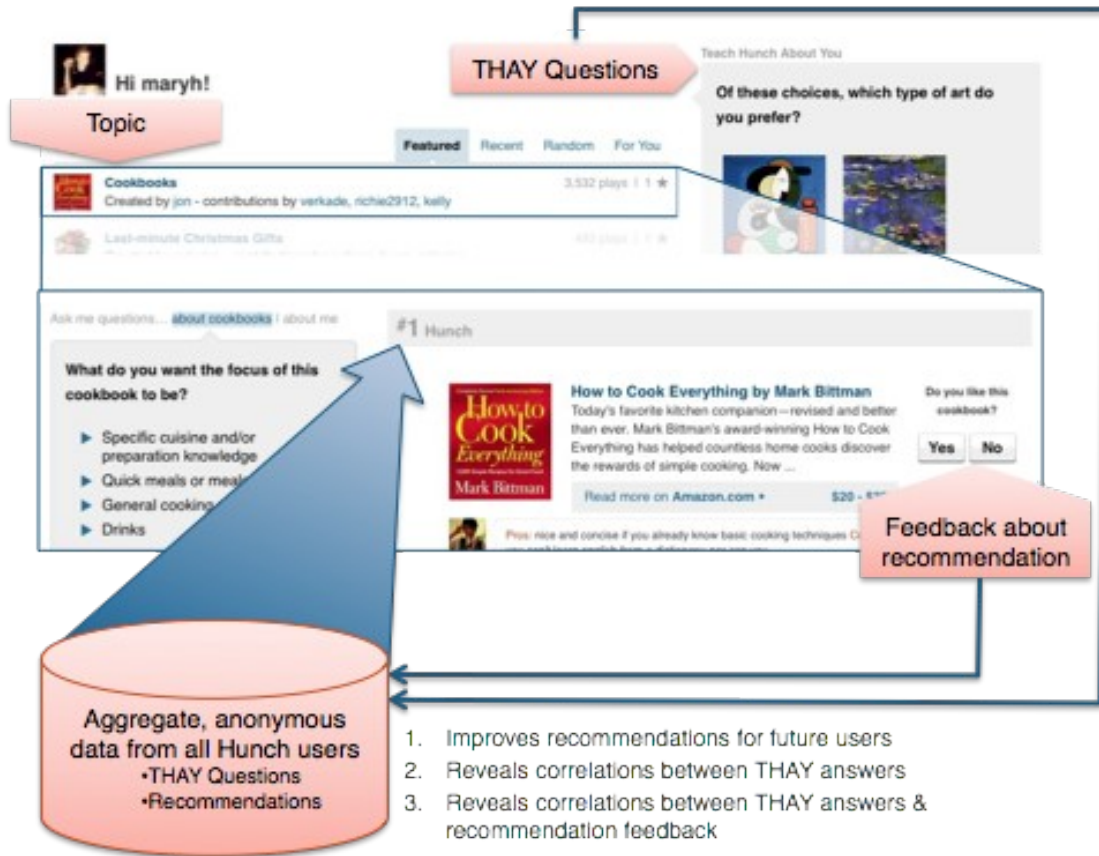
- Just because Mainstream moms think the world needs more family values doesn't mean that they are any more likely to live close to their extended family.
- Just because Traditional moms are more likely to advocate homeschooling doesn't mean that they are any more likely to have been homeschooled themselves.
- Just because a mom may be a Rule Bender, it doesn't mean she's any less likely to think that it's never too late for a child to learn positive life lessons. There's a parenting style for every parent, and it's up to each mom to find the right style for herself.

How Hunch Works

Using Hunch, Mary gets a recommendation (in this example, about cookbooks) and also answers some THAY questions.

Hunch learns:

- Whether Mary likes each proposed recommendation
- How Mary's THAY answers correlate with her recommendation feedback





Methodology and disclaimers

Hunch was publicly launched in June 2009 and since then millions of people have used the site. More than 44 million THAY ("Teach Hunch About You") questions have been answered since that time. The motivation for people to answer Hunch questions is simply to receive better and more customized recommendations. For example, for the decision "Which magazine would I like?", Hunch would suggest a different answer to a "suburban working mom" than to a "college student in an urban area."

Hunch's THAY questions are designed to be engaging, innocuous and fun, and they are interspersed throughout the site so that they can be answered at a user's leisure. Questions are not grouped by any sort of theme; a common sequence of 3 might include: "How old are you?", "Can you juggle?", and "What's your opinion of stem cell research?" As a result, the Hunch team has found that users enjoy answering the questions and do so honestly and consistently. There is little reason to answer dishonestly or attempt to "game" the system, since answers are solely designed to help the user get better recommendations. This research data is a by-product of Hunch's core business and mission, which is to provide smart recommendations to users. (a similar analogy might be the way search engines release data on popular searches. That data is a by-product of their core mission to help people find what they are looking for online).

Summary findings in this report are generally noted only when there is a statistically significant difference in the answers of the subsets being compared. Sample sizes are listed, as well as error ranges based on a 95% statistical confidence level.

Hunch strives to uncover insights which are interesting, provocative, and which will stimulate discussion and debate. Hunch does not endorse or favor particular ideological points of view, and the contents of Hunch reports do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Hunch as an entity or its staff or directors.

It should be noted that Hunch is not a professional research organization and this data was not collected in a perfectly controlled way. For example, Hunch data is based on 1) a group of individuals who are by definition all users of the Hunch website; these users are likely more internet-savvy than the general population, more open to new technologies, and more interested in social media. The group, while large at millions of users, has not been weighted to reflect actual demographic segmentation, and is not necessarily representative of general populations. 2) Questions on Hunch are voluntarily answered by users who choose to answer them. Therefore it's possible that those users who skipped a question might have different views than those who answered a question.

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For more information or questions please contact: Kelly Ford, Hunch Inc., kford@hunch.com.