

Executive Summary

the truth about

MODERN FAMILIES

McCANN
WORLDGROUP

The Truth About Modern Families in Ten Conversations

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“Families are factories for the manufacture of insanity.”

FRAN LEBOWITZ

It's been nearly 8 years since our last Truth About Parents study was written, and since then we've seen an explosion of new ideas and behaviors around what it means to “parent”—and more than that, what it means to build a family, with or without children. To capture the full nuance and depth of these shifts, we've expanded our study from focusing on parents exclusively to understanding ‘Modern Families’ in all their wonderful weirdness.

The Truth About Modern Families is based on an evolving methodology and follows over a decade of studying the culture of parents and families. This executive summary reveals a sneak peek of the 10 most exciting and dynamic conversations we've identified in 2023, as families all over the world discover new configurations and complexities in the lives they share.



The Flexible Family Conversation

Globally, the “conventional” nuclear family maintains its status as a cultural norm in some parts of the world. However, there is increasing evidence that this is changing, and we need an evolved definition of family to reflect our new reality. Who and what constitutes your family has become a deeply personal choice for more and more people around the world.

Amongst individuals who identify as LGBTQ+, we find the inverse to be true, a real embrace of the notion of “chosen families.” 54% of LGBTQ+ individuals believe families are the people you choose along the way as opposed to 46% who believe families are determined by birth and who you were raised with.

How might we foster a deeper, more emotional understanding of the modern family, focusing less on how families “look” and more on how families “feel”?

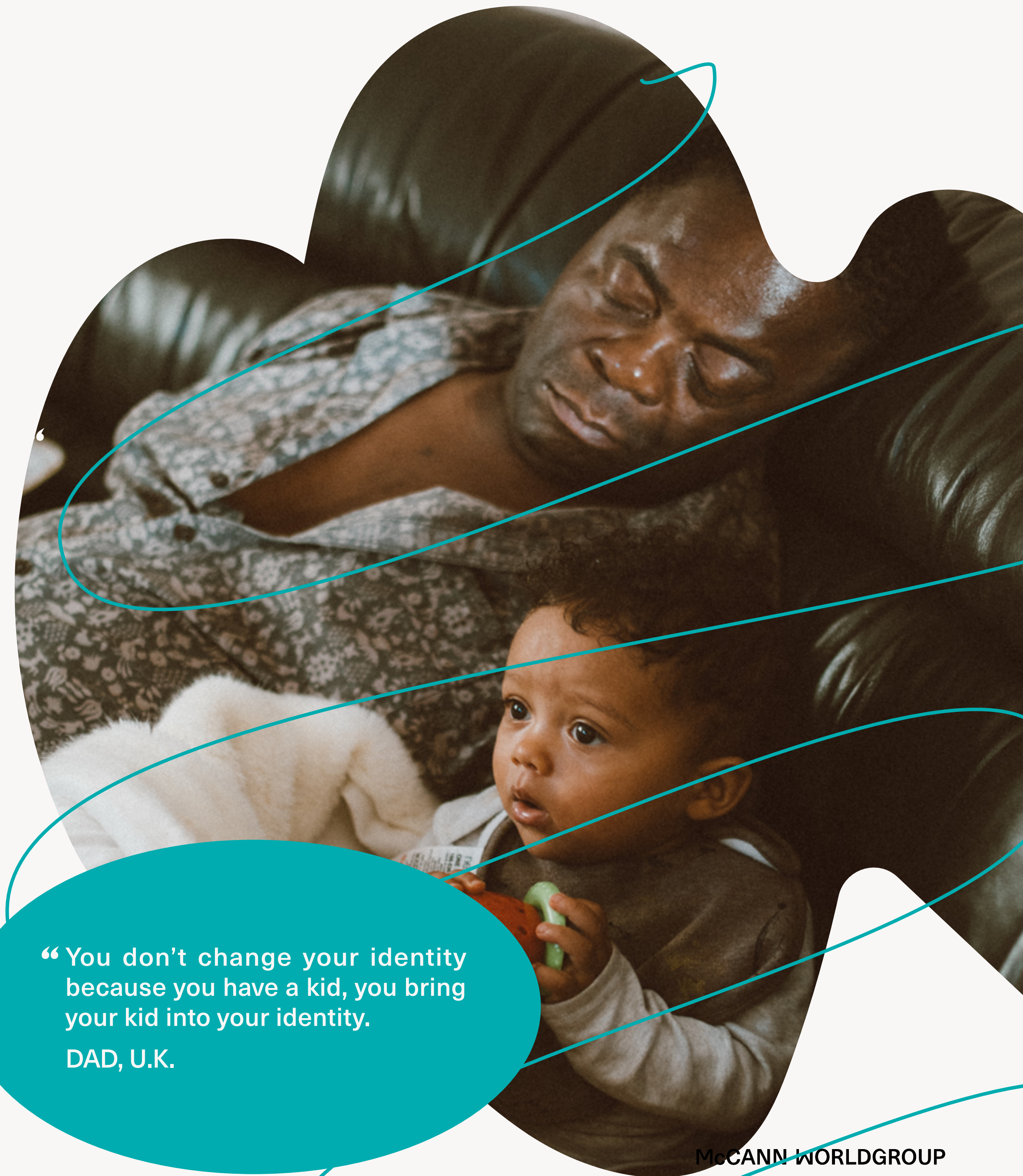
57% of people globally say families are determined by birth and who you were raised as opposed to 43% who say families are the people you choose along the way.

The Identity Conversation

Identity is complicated for parents; on the one hand, having a child means radically shifting your priorities to support their needs. But on the other, more and more parents don’t simply consider themselves “a mum” or “a dad”—and feel pigeon-holed when culture replaces their entire identities with this role. Parents are pushing back against being defined narrowly as just one thing.

How might we encapsulate the full spectrum of a parents’ identity beyond their familial relations? What does it mean to communicate with someone when they are in “parent mode” vs “non-parent mode”?

While the majority of parents (83%) agree that being a parent is the most important part of their identity, we found that almost 2 in 10 parents say being a parent is not the most important part of their identity. Among those aged 65+, this rises to 1 in 4.



“You don’t change your identity because you have a kid, you bring your kid into your identity.”

DAD, U.K.

THREE

The Superhero Parent Conversation

Despite the explosion of social media posts and brand campaigns to reveal the “real side of parenting,” our research reveals that the pressure to be the “perfect” parent has only grown over time. What’s more, the pressure doesn’t always come from peers or strangers, but can come from within the family.

How can brands help parents reclaim confidence in their own choices? How can we spark empathy and dialogue, rather than judgement and comparison, across different parenting “styles”?

45% of parents say they sometimes feel like other parents are judging them (rising from 38% in 2015), and 39% say they worry that other parents they meet are better than they are (rising from 33% in 2015).


FOUR

The Happiness vs. Success Conversation

We all want the best for our children, no matter what form a family takes. But what does “the best” mean? It might sound like a truism, but our research solidified that the fundamental thing parents want for their children is to be happy—where this gets interesting is how parents are defining what happiness means.

For an increasing number of parents, fame, success and happiness are becoming interwoven. Harnessing the “influence” and “fame” of very young people is a complex issue for brands. On the one hand, many parents are keen for their children to lean into this aspect of the modern world. On the other hand, there are ethical concerns when it comes to the relationship between mental health and navigating influence and “fame” on social media

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of parents say it’s more important for their kids to be happy than for them to be successful or rich.

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a pink shirt, is braiding the dark hair of a young girl. The girl is wearing a brown top and a pearl necklace. They are sitting on a bed with blue and white striped bedding. The background shows a window with white curtains.

“ What hurt me the most is following Instagram accounts where moms are working, but also doing piano lessons, crafts and homeschooling, and it made me feel like a really crappy mom. My husband is always telling me to unfollow them because it’s unhealthy.
MOM, FRANCE

Even when more and more media focus has been on the mental health consequences of social media, we discovered that nearly half of parents (48%) say they would love it if their child would become famous, rising from 40% in 2015.

The Family Hierarchy Conversation

The power dynamics within the household appear to be moving towards a more democratic balance, with cultural nuances depending on where you are in the world.

A new approach to the family hierarchy requires a new understanding of how influence flows through the household. Family “teams” represent a new eco-system where everyone has an active role to play, and everyone can learn from each other. How might we understand how influences flow through the household? Who are the decision makers brands should be speaking to, and how does this vary between cultures? Has the modern family evolved to reflect more of a sport teams’ dynamic?

Two-thirds of parents say they want their children to consider them as a friend.

The Tech Conversation

With the rise of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies, we’re seeing greater uncertainty around the role of tech in family life. However even with screen limits or bans on devices at home, technology is still regarded as a net positive on family life.

When asked what excites them for the potentials of AI, like everyone, parents are most excited that AI will make their lives easier, we found that Dads (62%) are more excited than Moms (57%) that AI could make their life easier. However, only 10% of parents globally say they’re excited about AI helping them raise their kids—suggesting that AI should help ease the obstacles preventing more family time.

As technology is neither good nor evil, how can we use it more intentionally to imbue family life with more joy and fewer frictions while protecting children from its harms?

64% of parents say technology helps them get more out of family life, increasing from just under half (47%) in 2015.

“ I make it clear to my daughter that I can be her friend only sometimes, not all the time. She’s only ten, so we could only be friends after she develops the ability of deciding what’s right from wrong.

DAD, CHINA

“ We’re raising a family that is going to grow up in a world that has technology embedded in it, and there’s absolutely no reason for us to pretend like that’s not the case.

DAD, U.S.

SEVEN

The Fathers Can't Have It All Conversation

The role of dads in modern life has evolved to become more enlightened and expansive than in years past. Increasingly, Dads are now in the spotlight to be the master jugglers of work, life and home—now facing the pressure and perhaps judgement that has long been on Mom's shoulders.

As the role of dads in modern life evolves in a more enlightened way, it will be critical all parents see their reality reflected in culture. How would brands behave differently if they evolved their primary audience from “moms” to “parents?”

Two-thirds of dads say there is too much pressure for them to “have it all” these days, a significant jump from 49% in 2015.

55% of parents say that men are better fathers than they used to be, compared to 50% in 2015 (with the highest agreement in India, Thailand and Turkey).

EIGHT

The Child-Free Conversation

Today, the discourse around the Child-Free by Choice movement is gaining momentum and is understandably divided, from aspirational content like @richauntisupreme and the Living Alone Diaries trend to the backlash in the form of the #Tradwife and Pronatalists.

How can we bring Child-Free by Choice individuals into the fold, reflecting their choices as part of a balanced conversation about the future of families?

38% of non-parent globally say they have decided not to have kids, and a further nearly one third (28%) say they are undecided.



“Some people are starting to realize just how much work it is to have children. I think it's courageous to think for yourself and decide not to have children. It's honest.

DAD, FRANCE

The Parenting Taboos Conversation

Parents are breaking down the culture of shame that tells them to ‘keep quiet’ when things are hard. Modern parents are keen to challenge established taboos, and air out the problems that have long remained hidden.

Breaking taboos has many potential benefits (and risks) for brands, from opening a rich seam of creativity, to bringing new people into a conversation who previously felt overlooked, to dividing their audience. How might we foster a more honest conversation about what it means to be a parent in today’s world?

47% of parents say they’ve questioned their decision to have children, even if for a minute.

The Brand Conversation

Modern families need all the support they can get, but our research reveals the sheer amount of choice and information is backfiring.

So what truly resonates with modern families? For the most part it’s simply telling them it’s okay and to just keep going. After all, if families truly are ‘little insanity factories’ then everyone has a unique—and messy—journey with highs and lows along the way. A new era of parenting needs a new era of marketing. There is a clear need for solutions that leans into the complex, democratic and mixed-up world of modern families.

66% of parents say that when it comes to making good parenting decisions, there is too much conflicting information out there (an increase from 53% in 2015).

“I think there are a lot of cool women today who are parenting influencers and are open about how tiring and difficult it is to raise children. The new generation is more willing to speak more openly about the challenges of being a parent.

MOM, FRANCE

“The brand message should be: If you face this situation, it’s normal, if you face this situation, it’s normal. If it’s this, it’s normal. Just say: keep going, it’s normal.

DAD, FRANCE

A Note on Methodology

Truth About Moms was originally conducted in 2012. It was based on an online quantitative survey of 6,800 online moms conducted in the U.K., U.S., Italy, Japan, Brazil, China, India and Mexico. In addition, it contains insights from over 40 focus groups conducted in all the above markets plus Indonesia, Malaysia, Peru, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand.

The Truth About Parents refresh, conducted in 2015, involved quantitative research in 18 markets globally, and sampled 500 moms and 500 dads in each (making for a total sample of over 18,000 online parents). Markets surveyed were U.S., U.K., Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Philippines, Russia, South Africa, Spain, and Turkey.

Truth About Parents, conducted in 2022, sampled over 55,921 people globally in an online quantitative research, along with insights from group discussion with parents and parents-to-be in U.S., U.K., France, and China. Markets surveyed included: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Philippines, South Korea, South Africa, Russia, Singapore, Spain, Thailand, Turkey, UAE, U.K., U.S.

To learn more about our work please visit

www.mccannworldgroup.com/about/truth

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