



# **THE STATE OF MOTHERHOOD IN AUSTRALIA**

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**MARKETING  
TO MUMS**



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# ABOUT THIS REPORT

This research report is proudly brought to you by Marketing to Mums, Australia's only marketing and research consultancy dedicated to delivering strategies to attract and deeply engage with mothers, the world's most powerful consumer. Marketing to Mums provides strategic, research and educational support to brands and government.

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# ABOUT KATRINA

'The State of Motherhood in Australia' report is authored by Katrina McCarter, the CEO and founder of Marketing to Mums. Katrina is a Marketing Strategist, Bestselling Author, International Award-winning Speaker and Business Advisor. Katrina is best known for her depth of understanding of the mother market and her ability to identify key opportunities often overlooked by brands and businesses.

Katrina is considered a global authority on marketing to mothers. She is the author of *Marketing to Mums* (2016) and *The Mother of All Opportunities* (2019). She is the host of Marketing to Mums, the world's first (and only) podcast on marketing to mothers where she interviews brand leaders, researchers and marketing specialises to better understand mum's changing behaviours and help brands drive their sales and profit.

Katrina is an award-winning international speaker where she shares her research and strategies. In 2018 she was voted the best speaker in New York after delivering the closing keynote address at M2Moms® – the Marketing to Moms conference.

Katrina is a sought-after media commentator and has featured in TV, radio, print and digital media. In 2019, 2018 and 2017 she was named a finalist in B&Ts Women in Media awards. In 2020 she was named on Remodista's Women2Watch, a list of 100 women who are seen as global pioneers of digital disruption.



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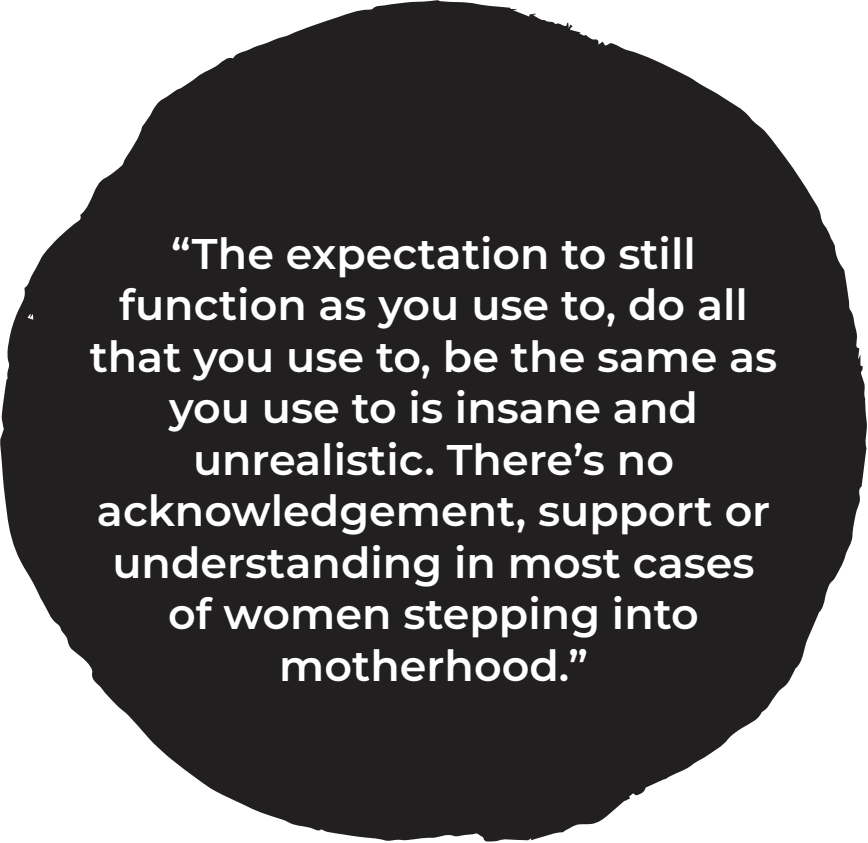
“There are 6.2 million mothers in Australia and they are responsible for spending \$132 billion in this country every year. They are powerful consumers who spend for multiple generations. Marketing to Mums’ ‘State of Motherhood in Australia’ report reveals a very grim portrait of being a mother in Australia today. Our report finds that **Australian mothers feel overwhelmingly misunderstood, misrepresented and undervalued by society, employers and brands.** There are enormous opportunities at government, societal and business levels to better engage mothers, build stronger relationships and support these women. Now, more than ever, we need to reflect, review and reinvent the way we communicate and support these women. It’s time for change.”

Katrina McCarter  
CEO, Marketing to Mums

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Marketing to Mums 'State of Motherhood in Australia' reveals that mothers in Australia feel undervalued and unsupported by society, businesses and government. The survey of more than 400 mothers, largely Millennial mothers, found 63% believe society does not do a good job at understanding and supporting mothers.



**“The expectation to still function as you use to, do all that you use to, be the same as you use to is insane and unrealistic. There’s no acknowledgement, support or understanding in most cases of women stepping into motherhood.”**

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Marketing to Mums' 'State of Motherhood in Australia' research was conducted via an online survey taken between 25th November and 9th December 2019. A total of 403 Australian mothers participated in the online survey of which 341 were Millennial mothers. These mothers were from all over Australia and had a diverse range of work arrangements and household incomes.

*Please be aware Marketing to Mums is currently undertaking specific research into the impact Covid19 is having on Australian mothers and this is due for release in June 2020.*

# *key findings*

Five key insights were made about the current state of motherhood in Australia



# *finding* 1

## **SOCIETY DOESN'T SUPPORT AUSTRALIAN MOTHERS**



### **KEY STAT**

- ▶ 63% of mothers surveyed believe society does NOT do a good job at understanding and supporting mums

Mothers across Australia made it very clear that they feel **misunderstood and unsupported by society**. Millennial mothers, with their high education levels and entrepreneurial spirit, have learned from previous generations that they cannot 'have it all'. They actively reject the expectation that they can be the perfect mother, rise in the career ranks, all while having a successful relationship with their partner. Increasingly, they feel isolated and alone. **They seek less judgement**, more understanding and greater support from society.

## IN MUMS' WORDS

“I think mothers need more support and understanding of what we actually do and what it involves to be a mum.”

“I think it's just an expectation that mothers just do everything and should just get on with it.”

“We are expected to be at work earning money and focus 100 percent on the job and act like it's our main priority and as if we have no competing family distractions of children. At the same time, we are to be a mother that prioritises children and puts them first and family above work. It's exhausting and impossible.”

“Society is very opinionated about what mums should or should not do when the same doesn't apply to dads who are praised for things mums do every day. They don't understand the mental stress we endure as a working parent or a stay at home parent.”

“I think there isn't enough support for working mothers and negative attitudes continue to thrive around working mothers.”

# IN MUMS' WORDS

“The world is changing and expectations are shifting. It is becoming overwhelming trying to be a “good Mum” while balancing work and finances. People are isolated and doggy paddling their way through.”

“Mothers are made to feel guilty for a lot of the things we choose to do when bringing up our children. Whatever decision we feel is right for our baby is always highlighted as being the wrong one.”

“There is so much judgement and not enough support.”

“I think there is too much pressure on mums to be perfect and get it all right, and the guilt and internal pressure we put on ourselves, is from societies views. Rather than giving mums the support to do what they feel is best someone is always telling mums what's best.”

“I think they put a lot of pressure on new mums but minimal understanding and support! ”

# IN MUMS' WORDS

“Society needs to mind their own business. No new mother needs a random stranger touching her baby or giving them advice. If you see a mother who’s having a tough time and you can’t help but involve yourself in a stranger’s business - ask her what SHE needs, rather than pushing your version of what YOU think is best. Tell her she’s doing a good job or simply move on if it’s too hard. She doesn’t need to go home and cry and feel like a failure over the things a random stranger said to her because they couldn’t mind their own business.”



## *finding* 2

# MOTHERHOOD ADVERSELY IMPACTS A WOMAN'S MENTAL HEALTH

## KEY STAT

- ▶ 40% of mothers surveyed claim their mental health has deteriorated since becoming a mother



The societal pressures on women as they become mothers has a negative impact on their wellbeing with **40% of respondents claiming their mental health has deteriorated since becoming a mother**. Only 26% of mothers believe their mental health has improved since becoming a mother, with the remaining 34% feeling there was no change as a result of motherhood.

There are numerous opportunities for government and employers to introduce greater accessibility to care as well as new program initiatives aimed at supporting mothers through the first 12-18 months of transition into motherhood.

**There are many opportunities for brands** to play an increased role at a pivotal time when mothers are reassessing their brand relationships. Being more realistic in the imagery used and level of empathy displayed would be warmly received.

# IN MUMS' WORDS

“My self-esteem has been greatly impacted by the changes that come with motherhood. Whilst I am not depressed, it is a constant effort to stay mentally and physically healthy.”

“I have no time for me. I barely even have time to sleep.”

“I suffered post-natal anxiety after my first and while I am doing much better, I still question myself a lot more now than I ever did before, and don't get a lot of time to care for myself, and that all affects my mental health.”

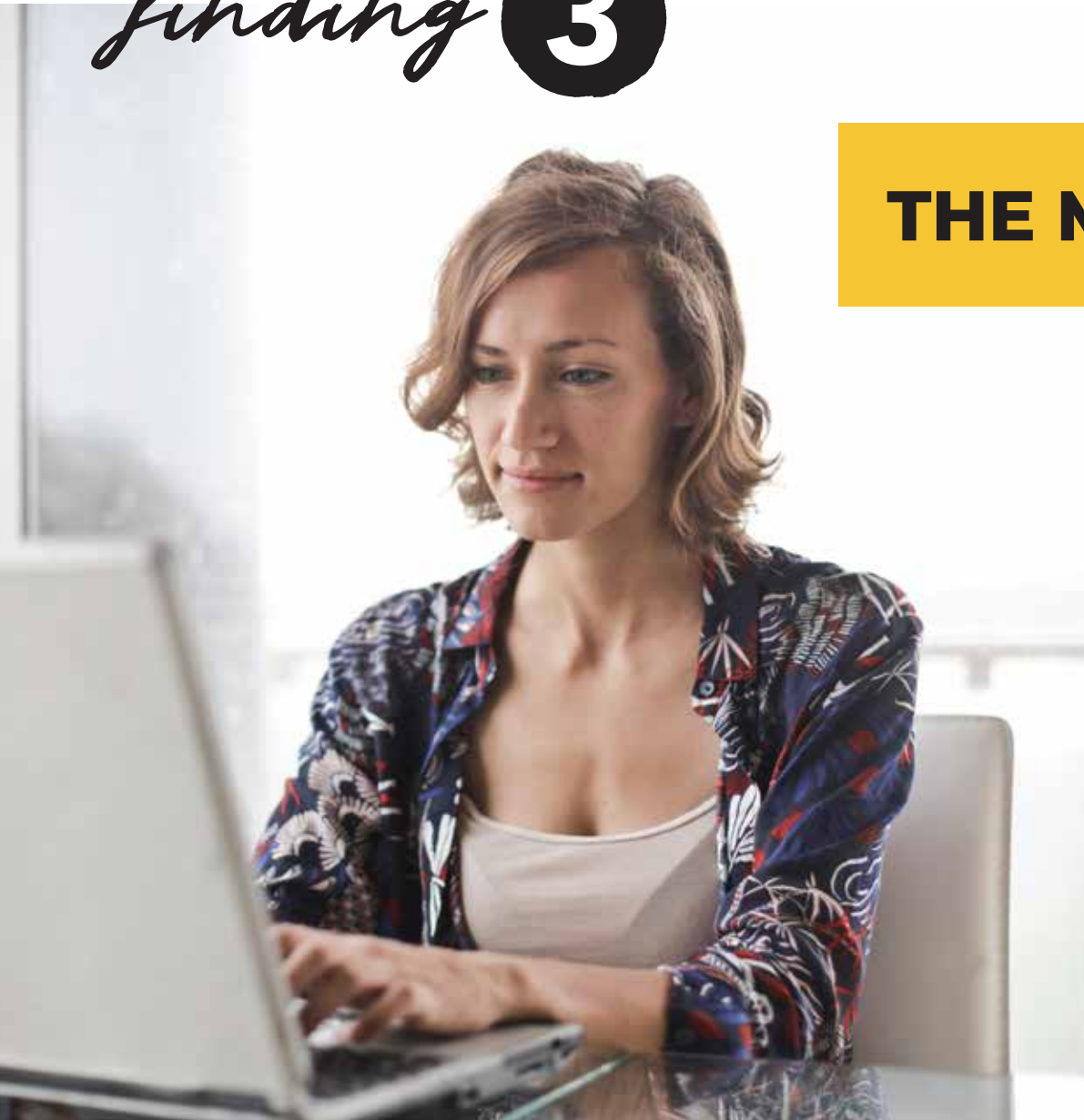
“I put my all in to being a mum and putting myself last. Not much time for myself as always running around doing things or nothing left to spend lol. Can be mentally draining at times.”

“Post-partum depression has taken a serious toll, much worse the second time round.”

“It's hard to feel like you are doing right when we live in a society where everything we do is labelled wrong.”



# finding 3



## THE MATERNAL WALL IS REAL

### KEY STAT

- ▶ 83% of mothers surveyed felt there were career trade-offs when a woman becomes a mother

In 2004 the Harvard Business Review published an article titled 'The Maternal Wall' which said “**women who have been very successful may suddenly find their proficiency questioned** once they become pregnant, take maternity leave, or adopt flexible work schedules.”

The Maternal Wall is flourishing with 83% of mothers surveyed stating there were career trade-offs when a woman becomes a mother. The extra time to catch up, if that were even possible, significantly impacted their superannuation. It impacted their self-worth and confidence. **It's no surprise that Australian women continue to delay motherhood.**

## IN MUMS' WORDS

“I know I will never be able to do the promotional project work I was chosen for before childbirth upon return to work until at least my baby (or any subsequent siblings) are at school, if ever.”

“The gap in working impacts your super. Then returning part time limits career options severely.”

“It takes three years to catch up again, once you advise you are pregnant. You are overlooked for promotions and pay rises. Then after your maternity leave you have to prove yourself again for another year.”

“Opportunities for promotions and pay rises decrease when switching to part time or returning from maternity leave.”

“Overlooked for opportunities whilst pregnant, suggestions of stepping down from management in order to attend IVF appointments, seen as unreliable due to inflexible work arrangements to access infertility treatment.”

“You have to choose which you want more.”

# IN MUMS' WORDS

“We’re expected to raise our children as though we don’t have jobs and work as though we don’t have children.”

“There is still an expectation that mothers will give up work hours, career progression and further education.”

“The expectation to still function as you use to, do all that you use to, be the same as you use to is insane (and unrealistic). In most cases, there’s no acknowledgement, support or understanding of women stepping into motherhood.”

“I believe a lot of mothers have to choose to have children when it suits their career instead of when it may suit their personal life.”

“Everyone expects less of you being the nicest way to put it, they don’t offer you opportunities because before they even offer they assume you can’t fulfil them or won’t be interested anyway so why both asking right? Wrong, being invited, being treated equal, being treated as a person and for your strengths as a worker and as an individual person and not as a mother at your place of work is the most important thing! A man isn’t treated differently when he goes back to work after his wife having a child, he’s not assumed that he now won’t travel, or take up job opportunities because he’s a dad now; he’s not treated as a dad at work but yet women are treated as mums at work, it’s like becoming a mother is seen as a disability or disadvantage.”

# finding 4



## **MOTHERS CARRY A HUGE SENSE OF FAILURE AS THEY TRANSITION INTO MOTHERHOOD**

### **KEY STAT**

- ▶ 58% of mothers surveyed felt as though they were failing in their child's first year of life

Mothers carry a sense of failure which is heightened as they transition into motherhood with 58% of mothers surveyed said they felt as though they were failing in their child's first year of life. **Many felt lonely, isolated, unsupported and incompetent.** While these negative feelings decreased as their child grew older and they gathered more experience and confidence as a mother, it highlights that there is much to be done in better supporting new mothers.

# IN MUMS' WORDS

“All. The. Time. There is not enough support or people telling you that you’re doing a good job. Only judgement and terrible unsolicited advice.”

“I think as mothers we are so critical of ourselves and mum guilt is real. I wish I had a magic wand that shifted the thinking for all mothers from "I am not doing enough" to "Wow! This is what I can do”.”

“On maternity leave I struggled to be “just” a parent.”



# IN MUMS' WORDS

“I didn't feel like I was failing my son, I feel like I was failing myself. I sacrificed everything I had in my life and more - mentally, physically, emotionally for him - but that's what I had to do to give him everything and every opportunity he deserved and the best start to his life. I sacrificed my mental health, my sleep, my wellbeing, everything I had. By the end of it I didn't even know who I was. My husband asked me often, 'What do I want to do?' 'What do I enjoy?' I couldn't answer those simple questions for so long. I just didn't have an identity anymore.”

“My first daughter was in the 5th percentile and I constantly blamed myself for it. I also had to go back to work when she was 10 months old and leave her at the day care which broke my heart for the first few weeks. The guilt every time she was sick was also hard.”





*finding* **5**

**GOVERNMENT, SOCIETY,  
BUSINESSES AND BRANDS  
COULD DO BETTER TO  
SUPPORT AUSTRALIAN  
MOTHERS**

Australian mothers were scathing in their description about the **lack of financial, emotional and mental support made available to new mothers**. They painted a picture of a lonely, isolated and thankless role. They seek much greater focus on the level of support provided at government, organisation and brand level. First and foremost, they seek a shake-up of parental leave, particularly for partners. **Until there is greater acceptance and initiatives made for their male partners, they see little changing**. They are also calling for government reform to address the superannuation gap from staying home to raise a child. There was strong support for more initiatives to support a mother's mental wellbeing in her transition into motherhood and beyond. **They believe that every level of society has a role to play** whether that be through policy, marketing messaging or an individual's comments and judgements.

# IN MUMS' WORDS

“We need to start seeing time taken off to stay at home with kids as equally valuable as staying in a paid job. I know that I am much more patient, tolerant, adaptable, and confident since having my children, and I think these qualities should transfer over to the workplace should I return to work. Society sees staying at home as an impediment to career progression; I think it is quite the opposite. Mothers have so much to offer!”

“Greater support of and recognition for parents, better parental leave support, better employee support through flexible work agreements and paid parental leave for primary and non-primary carers.”

“Having more mental health support programs in place for new parents to help them with the transition into parenthood.”

“Raise the profile of stay at home mums. It is a full-time job without the monetary benefits. Maybe part of the family allowance could be paid into the mother's super so the years without working still provide some super.”

“Value the role of a mother in and of itself, giving it the status, it deserves. Acknowledge how incredibly difficult it is. Maybe provide new mothers with a weekly session at the gym with childcare. It helps with stress levels, health, energy levels and just an excuse to get out and see other adults during a time that can be incredibly lonely.”

# IN MUMS' WORDS

“More support groups for new mothers, better and cheaper access to mental health practitioners, at least during the post-partum period and better and longer paternal leave options for partners.”

“More jobs available for mothers without the ‘oh you have kids’ rejection.”

“I have many mum friends who all have a story to tell about entering back into the workplace and either been demoted or redundant as their position is no longer available. There is a massive stigma about mums re-entering the workforce that needs to be addressed.”

“Government needs to crack down on workplace bullying of pregnant women and workplaces who are not supportive of flexibility for parents. We have so much technology at our fingertips, working from home if your child is sick is possible, and doesn't need to be met with bullying.”

“Businesses and brands need to stop promoting “mummy clichés”. I feel like they only know beige bland perfect family mums or the crazy wine time sort.”

“The media could present all types of mothers. Not just unrealistic text book mothers.”

# IN MUMS' WORDS

“Focus on importance of equal parenting, encourage dads to take on care and time off and paternity leave to support mum's careers.”

“Openly talk about the loneliness and failure that you feel. The only thing that made me feel better was realising someone else had felt the same tricky emotions I had.”

“More discussion in pre-natal classes about the realities of mothering. We hear a lot about prepping for birth but less about what to do next.”

“Even from birth the focus is on bub not on the Mum. They are expected to soldier on with very little support. Their contribution raising their children is seen as unimportant as it is not paid. Australia could actually start valuing mothers (and heck people involved in child raising as a whole including child care workers) pay an annual amount into their super so we don't end up with no retirement because we actually raised our children. Acknowledge everyone has different paths and they all have value.”

“More flexibility with parents taking and sharing leave entitlements without judgement, snide comments or work ramifications.”

# IN MUMS' WORDS

“The government should make childminding and childcare free. Scrap the Centrelink reforms and base the childcare on some successful European countries. A child needs its mother for the first year of their life as well as their dad. The government should also introduce law for flexibility to workplace and maternity laws, as well as returning to jobs.”

“More community help programs. Free or heavily discounted counselling or psychology. Therapy is so expensive and in a lot of cases people need many more than 10 sessions.”



# REFLECTIONS

Australian mothers are calling for change.

They seek to be acknowledged and better supported for their contribution to raising the next generation. They want government and employer support to make it easier for mothers to re-enter the workforce and to find that elusive balance between family, work and everything else. Additionally, programs to better support a new mother's transition into motherhood are needed to address high stress levels and poor mental health.

Australian mothers are calling for brands to stop perpetuating stereotypes about being the 'perfect mum' which only fuels their guilt and is detrimental to their wellbeing. They want brands to better understand who they are and stop treating them as one homogeneous group.

There has never been a better time to reflect, review and reinvent your communications, strategies and policies impacting Australian mothers (and fathers). Marketing to Mums can assist you better understand Australian mothers, identify key emerging trends (including impacts from Covid19 to their behaviours) and develop more effective strategies.



**LET MARKETING TO  
MUMS HELP YOU  
ATTRACT, CONNECT  
AND ENGAGE WITH  
AUSTRALIAN MOTHERS**

**At a brand and business level,** we can research projects to clearly identify and understand your segment of the mum market. We can then develop strategies to better communicate your messages to truly resonate with this powerful audience.

**At a government and employer level,** Marketing to Mums can assist you better understand the diverse spectrum of Australian mothers. We can assist you build programs to better support Australian mothers throughout their journey through motherhood.

**By ensuring a deeper understanding of motherhood in Australia and addressing your communications and strategies you will demonstrate your level of care and support to Australian mothers.**



# Want more?

## IF YOU FOUND THIS REPORT VALUABLE AND WANT MORE:

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# Here's what people say about us

“Katrina McCarter is without doubt a global leader when it comes to the extraordinary opportunity that is the ‘mum’ market. She has an incredible depth of knowledge and experience, backed up with detailed research. Corporations around the world need to listen to what Katrina has to say.”

**Andrew Griffiths, Entrepreneurial Futurist**

“In a world where technology is personalising everything around us, it is important that marketers think about different segments deeply and clearly and if you are marketing to mums, Katrina is your lady. I recommend her to anyone who needs to make meaningful connections with mums.”

**Ryf Quail, Content Director, ad:tech Sydney**

“We have been fortunate to feature Katrina McCarter on our M2Moms®-Marketing to Moms program for the past 3 years. Founded in 2005, M2Moms® is the only executive learning event in the world that specializes in helping brands deliver better business results with today’s mom & family consumers. Katrina is one of the leading voices in the world on this topic. She is a global expert whose passion and prowess is boundless and borderless. On the page or on the stage, Katrina McCarter never disappoints. She’s got the goods. “

**Nan McCann Co-Founder & Producer M2Moms®-The Marketing to Moms Conference  
M2W®-The Marketing to Women Conference**



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