



## [B-Rant](#)

- submitted by Delia Lloyd on 10/13/2008

# Mommy Wars Redux: How Simone De Beauvoir Rescued Me In The Suburbs

By Delia Lloyd

Look out, folks, the "Mommy Wars" are back. With the nomination of Sarah Palin as John McCain's running mate, a whole new round of battles has erupted over women who work or choose to stay at home, and the consequences for family, career and humankind. And, predictably, the internet is lighting up with vitriol from both sides of this debate.

From my own perch as a writer/mom in the burbs--one who spends a good chunk of her day devoted to professional pursuits while also active in the PTA--I've always thought that this dichotomy was overdone. To my mind, the real divide is not between who works and who doesn't, but between two other archetypes that populate the suburban landscape: prissy and earthy-crunchy moms. So as long as we ladies are out there propagating dangerous stereotypes about each other, allow me to contribute my own overly-stylized portrait of these two ends of the Mommy spectrum.

We all know Prissy mom. She shows up for school runs in her carefully orchestrated sweater set and asks, in all seriousness, "where you get your roots done." Prissy mom lives in a perfectly appointed home where the liquid soap dispenser in the powder room subtly picks up the seafoam flecks in the paisley wallpaper. She likes to read glossy women's magazines and thinks of *The Handmaid's Tale* as a classic. Her hot button issues are school uniforms, Sex Ed., and children's diseases. She champions them at the PTA and the Women's Club, where she is invariably an officer. And don't be fooled by that matching mani/pedi. Prissy mom can be quite steely--you don't want to get caught on the wrong end of a bake sale with her.

You've also met earthy-crunchy mom. Her hair is long and un-styled; her jeans jacket weighed down by pins from the many advocacy groups she supports. She adheres to Attachment Parenting, sends her kids to Waldorf School, and will go on and on about the importance of having a birth plan. She breast feeds her kids until they are four, then forces them

to drink soy milk and eat Veggie Bootie. Television, if she has one, is used exclusively for watching home movies and her kids' toys are all made of wood. She organizes marches against the local super-market and a percentage of her telephone bill funds socially important investments. Earthy-crunchy mom may seem tolerant and open-minded until you mention casually that you Ferberized your child. Then you are frozen out for good.

I've never felt comfortable with either kind of mom. I'm not nearly put together enough for the Women's Club set (my tennis game could easily qualify me for Special Needs.) Nor do I fit in with the wholesome crowd (when asked to draw my ideal birth scene in my La Maze class, I drew an epidural). But after much reflection (and many failed "dating" attempts with both kinds of moms), I finally figured it out. Although these two Mom-prototypes come wrapped in different cloaks (ponchos? pashminas?), each is very committed to pushing their identity qua women: whether via more traditional venues like the PTA/Women's Club or in more militant social movement type ways. And I'm just not an "I am Woman; Hear me Roar" kind of gal.

For awhile, I felt pretty lousy about this. What kind of woman was I if I didn't feel inspired to organize around my essential identity? And how would I ever fit in if I failed to do so? And then, by chance, I happened to read Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, whose basic message is that there are no prescriptions for how to be a good woman. What's important is to engage with the world in ways that matter to you, regardless of what others might be doing or saying.

Beauvoir was talking about feminism, but her message is equally applicable to motherhood. It's easy to think that what kind of mom you are comes down to symbols: what you wear...where you shop...what causes you support. But at the end of the day, it's not whether you're a card-carrying member of La Leche or lobby for a V-chip on school computers. Just like it's not really about whether you take pride in being the family's primary bread-winner or brag that your child has never had a babysitter. It's about the freedom to choose. This is an old message, to be sure, but when I read Beauvoir I found it to be--for lack of a better word--liberating.

And so, instead of joining either of the two protests on at my kid's school this week--one about uniforms, the other about healthy eating--I'm writing this article instead. And you know what? I feel pretty good.

*Delia Lloyd is a writer in London. Her essays have appeared in The International Herald Tribune, The Christian Science Monitor, and The Guardian Abroad.*

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***I hear you, sister!*** - submitted by Anonymous on 10/14/2008

I have never fit in with either set and am sure that the other moms on the playground either love me or hate me - some think I'm bossy and rude, others think I'm rude and bossy. But I try to maintain being true to my self - and my kids - and I will always adhere to the one motto which for years has rung true in my head - fuck 'em if they can't take a joke. This applies to everything in life, including motherhood, the PTA and even Sarah Palin.

***Earthy-crunchy is gross!*** - submitted by Anonymous on 10/14/2008

I could be deeply offended by this piece as I never leave the house without a manicure. How I look - and behave - in public is very important to me, as it should be for all women. But I can relate to your caricature of the earthy-crunchy moms - aren't they just plain old yucky? I would hate, I mean hate, to be next to a woman who always wore jeans, and never had her roots done. How gross can you get???

***THIS IS GREAT!*** - submitted by Anonymous on 10/14/2008

I LAUGHED SO HARD i ALMOST WET MYSELF! THANKS FOR WRITING, DELIA! I KNOW WOMEN WHO FIT INTO BOTH GROUPS! AREN'T THEY OTH AWFUL!

***thanks*** - submitted by RKiser on 10/14/2008

hi delia, thanks for another hilarious essay! also, for reminding me that I need my roots done. After I finish organizing the school's Halloween party perhaps we can decompress over drinks.

***breath of fresh air*** - submitted by AL on 10/14/2008

This pov is just that. As women and mothers we are all, after all, working in one way or another. Where is it written that we have to judge or feel judged? If more of us could focus on the tremendous collective impact of mothers across the globe, imagine how sustaining that would be? Isn't Delia's world the one we want our daughters to grow up in?

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