**Competitive Mom Friends**

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Although the American Dream might be to have your own home with a white picket fence, when having babies, is it really ideal to exist in such isolation? I often find myself fantasizing about living in one of those documentaries on tribal cultures. I am willing to bet they are not making play dates or arrangements for walks with their running strollers. Their everyday life is spending time together as mothers, even while working side by side. Of course, I am romanticizing images I have seen on PBS, but I can't help but wondering what life must be like where community is something that just is, not something you have to search for.

For the average Western mom who doesn't live in a hippie haven, "mommy groups" are where mommies get together. I decided to try one these groups, but I found myself wanting to rebel against all the soft singing, and I felt a bit disturbed by the mass breast-feeding. Don't get me wrong, I am a breast-feeding advocate and will probably continue with it until things get awkward, but something about a group of babies scarfing, snuffling, suckling and spitting up made me want to dry heave. I don't know why; maybe it was too many exposed nipples or sincere, Earth Mother faces.

Where I so desperately wanted this experience to feel natural, I couldn't help thinking that the encounter with these other mothers was contrived. I found myself drowning in a sea of self-conscious conversations with moms who were way more competitive than I was prepared for because I had forgotten my scorecard.

I found that there were three main types of competitive mom friends.

One type was the "comparer." They would ask questions about your baby just so that they could compare your baby's progress to theirs. I found myself actually saying, "Oh, wow, your baby does back flips? That's amazing! What? Oh, no, my baby is not rolling over yet. Is it okay that I still love her?"

Then there are the "openly judgmental" moms, who have no problem telling you to your face what a terrible parent you are. There was one mom who was sure to let me know what a disgrace I was for not potty training my newborn infant. Supposedly she would just make some secret noise and her baby would poop gold pellets into her hand. I guess I am going to hell for using diapers, even if they are seventh-generation. Another mom told me I probably poisoned my child because I wasn't a vegan during my pregnancy, and she didn't seem too impressed that they were organic chicken nuggets.

The last category is the "one-upper." With these moms, no matter what your story about your baby may be, theirs is infinitely more dramatic. Mind you, it is not just about how great their baby is but also how much more difficult their experience of parenting is. If things are good for you, it's better for them, or if you are having a tumultuous time, their torment is exponentially more grave.

I found myself in conversations that went a little like this:

*Me:* "Man, I am so tired today. My baby was up a bunch last night because she had gas."

*Other parent:* "Yeah, my eyes are bleeding because I haven't slept for seven weeks. My baby had so many farts in his large intestines that he transformed into a Japanese Blowfish and has been piercing my flesh with his quills, causing me massive internal damage from the poison."

Or:

*Me:* "My baby started clapping her hands to the music the other day! It was so adorable!"

*Other parent:* "Yeah, my daughter was doing that in utero. Now she is playing Haydn's concerto in C major for the cello. I think when she starts standing on her own, I will introduce her to the violin, as well -- you know, so her brain doesn't go idle."

So what do I do? I want to be communal, one with the universe; I want mom friends. I need mom friends. I need someone to analyze my baby's vomit for an obnoxiously long time. I want to hear about how someone else deals when their baby pees in the bath. Do you pretend that you didn't notice like I do? Maybe I need to stop being such a wimp and start teaching my baby Sanskrit or something, so that I can fit in.