

Let's have a truce in 'mommy wars' [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

As roller derbies and female pro-wrestlers have long demonstrated, there's nothing sexier than a catfight. But the latest girl-on-girl battle isn't being waged in a rink or a ring, but in the op-ed pages of newspapers and on the bestseller lists. I'm talking about what the media has cutely dubbed "the mommy wars."

On one side are stay-at-home moms; on the other are working mothers. Each feels her choice is the best for her, and equally feels that the other option is the wrong one.

The latest salvo in this debate is the hotly discussed new book by magazine writer Caitlin Flanagan entitled *To Hell with All That: Loving and Loathing Our Inner Housewife*.

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Making matters worse is that Flanagan is maddeningly witty (she'd be easier to dismiss if she were a total twit) and even more maddeningly hypocritical. A nanny looked after her kids while she pursued her writing career and Flanagan, who urges women to "love their inner housewife," has a maid to do all her housework. For these glaring inconsistencies, Flanagan has been slammed in magazines, book reviews and websites.

The subtext of this debate is the question of whether feminism failed women -- and to that my answer would be "no." Women haven't been failed by a movement that allowed them greater rights and more options (including the option of being a stay-at-home mom).

Women have been failed by social, political and economic systems that haven't recognized that the world has changed. That many families can't afford to have one parent at home. That extended family does not fulfill the support role that it used to. That many women simply like working outside the home and don't see it as incompatible with being a mother. That most women want their partners to share in the cleaning, cooking and shopping. And that many dads want the flexibility to spend more time with their children, as well.

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So the last thing a stressed-out parent needs is to be judged by someone else. A friend of mine has a great name for the busybody mothers (and sometimes fathers) whose sole purpose in life is to make you feel like a crummy parent. She calls them "the organic-muffin moms."

The media-fed "mommy war" is the judgement of the organic-muffin mom writ large. And as entertaining as this battle might be, for legions of moms out there - both stay-at-home and employed -- it just distracts from the real, pressing issues of parenting: Childcare, health care, education and work-life balance.

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