

MOTHER'S DAY SPECIAL

The rise of the 'anti yummy mummy'

Two women turned their backs on parenting manuals and wrote a book and started a blog on the perils of modern motherhood

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Alex Manson-Smith and Sarah Thompson
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Childhood friends Sarah Thompson and Alex Manson-Smith didn't set out to be yummy mummies but admit they somehow ended up ticking a fair few of the boxes. There was that move to the countryside, the dog, the look-at-me buggies and the Etsy hobbies.

“When you become a mother you find yourself doing all sorts of strange things you’d never have dreamt about before,” says Manson-Smith, 40, mother to Emilio, 6, and Xavier, 3 (unusual children’s names — another box ticked). The pair began a blog, yoursomummy.com, which started as a rant against baking, and have written a book with the same title, in which they skewer their own yummy-mummy tendencies.

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Baking has become a look-at-me activity for thin, perfectionist women

“Motherhood has become a competitive sport, and you can feel very judged — and judging — sometimes,” she says. “So we wanted women to be able to laugh a bit, realise we are all feeling insecure — and maybe avoid some of the mummy traps we fell into.”

Here are some suggestions:

Call your child Paul or Karen

Giving your child an interesting and creative name implies a certain “flying in the face of convention” vibe, but as every yummy mummy knows there is a rigid code: no flowers any more (too popular), no cities (too common) and nothing in the top 100 names (this is definitely proof you have failed). Animals are fair game (Wolf, Bear, Otter), as is weather (Rainbow), Victorian-sounding murderers (Sid, Harold), soul singers (Otis, Elwood) or vintage (Edith, Betty).

“We found ourselves wandering around cemeteries, libraries and even department stores searching for the perfect boy’s name before settling on Emilio,” says Manson-Smith. The trouble is, you then realise the 21st-century playground is chock-full of Emilios, Indigos and Lovedays, says Thompson, also 40, who went down the vintage route with her children, Stanley, 9, and Betty, 7. “One of Stanley’s best friends is called Stanley, so of course if I’d really wanted to be different I would have called him Paul.”

Stay in the city

Manson-Smith and her husband, Misha, moved from east London to Sussex in search of a more *Swallows and Amazons* childhood for their sons, but they were back within

two years. “In some ways it was lovely; for the first time we really noticed the beauty of the changing seasons and had old-fashioned Sundays with proper lunches and a walk,” she says. “But after a while reality kicked in: a toddler playbarn is the same wherever you are, it always rains, everything is closed on Thursday afternoons and everyone was older than us.”

Don't turn your Etsy hobby into a business

If one of the perks of motherhood is that you can jump ship on a job you hate, the downside is that you eventually have to find something else, preferably between 10am and 2.30pm, from home and reasonably stress-free. “This is when the yummy mummy thinks, ‘I could use the hours my children are asleep or at school to make cushions/cards/cakes or be one of those women in Anthropologie aprons selling salted caramel brownies at market stalls,’ ” says Manson-Smith. “But it’s notoriously difficult to make any money. You work out your hourly rate and learn that you make less than your 16-year-old babysitter.”

Bin the catalogues

Every clothes catalogue that falls through your letterbox seems to be aimed squarely at you: *Hush, Me+Em, Toast, Baukjen* — all selling an enticing lifestyle and the kind of unthreatening but nicely practical clothes that every other mother is wearing. That’s how Manson-Smith ended up with six almost identical grey jumpers. “They’re a sort of uniform — I rotate them through the week depending on my mood,” she says. “But that’s where it can all go wrong. Boyfriend/girlfriend jeans and anything selling itself as sports luxe seem perfectly pitched at mothers. But it’s a trap, because unless you wear your £150 jogging bottoms with a 4in heel you just look depressed, or like one of those women who trot round in exercise gear without doing any actual exercise.”

Never bake

One of the many activities mothers are under pressure to like is baking. “We’re constantly reminded of its inextricable link with hearth and home, and it feels like a mark of your skills as a mother,” says Thompson. “But the trouble with reclaiming feminine crafts is that it’s not like something else gets dropped from the list to make up for it. And there’s something horribly competitive about the whole thing; it’s a look-at-me skill that’s become an activity for thin, perfectionist women who do it on top of their careers and children to show you what fabulous all-rounders they are.”

Refuse to believe that camping is a holiday

Go, if you must, for the children, says Thompson, because they do love it. “And you can boast to your friends about how they went ‘feral’ and post apple-cheeked pictures of them on Facebook. But despite your bell tent and Orla Kiely melamine cups, remember that for mothers it’s basically a long, long weekend of packing and unpacking, eating pork products, queueing for the washing-up shed and waking up at 4am because it’s daylight and someone weed in their sleeping bag.”

You’re So Mummy by Alex Manson-Smith and Sarah Thompson is published by Penguin, priced £12.99



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