

Mums reveal beta side

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family reporters

IT'S stilettos versus sandals in the new war of the mummies.

But it's not a clash between working mums and those who stay at home.

Rather, it's a battle between "alpha" mums who run their families like a business, and "beta" mums who let their children run free.

If you prefer tree climbing and finger painting to time management and finance spreadsheets, then you might be a beta mum.

But if you're tapping on a BlackBerry during the school run, and if your children's diaries are as full as yours, then you might be an alpha mum.

The emergence of the beta mum is a backlash against the supermum syndrome of the 1980s and 1990s when the alpha mum reigned supreme.

Natural Parenting Melbourne Association president Melinda Whyman said more parents were opting to slow down and connect more with their children.

"The myth has been broken," she said.

"People realise you can't be the superwoman — you can't have a connection to yourself, your partner and your children."



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How to pick an alpha mum:

- Wears power suits and stilettos
- Children attend classes in languages and music, and do accelerated learning
- Yearns to run children's parent-teacher group
- Values children's success

How to pick a beta mum:

- Wears jeans and sensible flat shoes
- Children play with their mother's friends' children
- Cannot remember date of the school fair
- Values her children's happiness

But given that 60 per cent of families have two incomes, many women are finding they are forced to be both alpha and beta — often in the same day.

The debate comes as prominent Australian mums speak out about their experiences juggling

family and work in a new book *MotherWho?*

High-profile mothers including Senator Natasha Stott Despoja and singer Kate Ceberano speak frankly about trying to get the right balance between work and family.

But many of their stor-

ies reflect a move towards the more relaxed beta style of parenting away from the alpha career-driven do-it-all mum.

Diane Evans, co-editor of *MotherWho?* with her sister Sharon, said that 10 years ago "in the age of the supermum there was only one way to be a mother".

"Now people are toying with different ways and they want a bit of both and there's no one right way to do it".

Working mother Kate Sykes, the creator of www.careermums.com.au, said women were amazing in how they managed the daily juggling act.

"The jump from heels and suits to home attire to deal with dinner, bathing, homework, stories and bed is a daily reality," she said.

Website www.careermums.com.au is an online national job classified service that connects skilled women to flexible roles.

Such services are making it easier for women to balance work and family, she said.

Net link:

www.motherwho.com.au
www.careermums.com.au
www.naturalparentingmelbourne.com.au