



# Paparazzi at the playground

## I AM NOT FAMOUS.

I see famous people at the playground every now and then and I wonder if I should pretend I don't know their kid's name (Finn) or who they are (Julia). Do I engage them just like any other mom sharing the sandbox with us and chat about naps and moan about preschools? Or should I let them be even when my kid snatches their shovel or drools on their truck?

When I saw Julia Roberts I was happy to see she looked like someone who had just had a baby. It made her seem human. I understand why celebrity moms lose their baby weight so fast, they need to. If I were being constantly scrutinized and trailed by cameras I guess I would find a way.

Sarah Jessica Parker even said she was lucky to have the time, the money and the help to get back into shape so quickly, understanding that not all of us do.

I wonder what it must be like for them to be constantly watched even when just playing with their kid? After all, I wouldn't know, as I said, I am not famous.

And yet, I was on the Third Street Promenade the other week.

My husband and I were struggling to get our son into his stroller, his body had gone as stiff as a surfboard and there were tears, lots of them.

But we could no longer carry him and he kept wandering off when we put him down to walk.

I was simply putting my kid in his stroller and he objected. We finished and all the clips were clicked and he was settling into his Maclaren.

I sighed for a moment as I came up for air only to notice some man with a video camera pointed directly at us, at my son, at me and my husband struggling with our son.

He clicked his camera off, smiled at me like thank you for the shot, as if he were really pleased with himself, and went on his way through the busy crowd.

I did not know what to make of it. What I did know was that I was mad.

My husband tried to reassure me it was no big deal. But my mind started racing. I could not possibly imagine what he would do with that footage, except make me look like a bad mom in front of a mass audience somewhere.

Welcome to Santa Monica, home of crying babies and stressed out, still-look-a-little-pregnant-mothers. I could feel the anger rise up through my body, in my core.

I felt intruded on for my child and for my parenting.

If I were famous, if I were a celebrity mom, it would make sense, though it would be worse. I would be equally intruded upon, equally mad, but then I would have to worry about my image, my career.

When we play side by side at the playground I often wonder how the paparazzi know they are there.

But there they are behind trees, up the street, all around.

Recently a group of us were all playing, including a celebrity mom and her kids. I noticed she looked quite beautiful, not just as a natural beauty, which she is, but made up and in nice clothes, which is not

the norm in the park.

And then, suddenly, taking up every square inch of exterior park perimeter were cameras snapping away.

I could feel the other mothers, nannies and myself form a protective ring around her and her children. One of the photographers shattered what seemed like the unspoken code and entered the actual playground stepping into the seesaw area only steps from us. I felt like our shield was cracked and I needed to do something.

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But she didn't seem to care. She effortlessly moved to the swings and continued her fun afternoon.

Who calls the paparazzi anyway? I am starting to think that the celebrity moms might. I used to think that was terrible. Yet, you rarely see pictures of Suri having a meltdown, of Kingston throwing a tantrum, or of Violet not smiling. Perhaps, there is an understanding of, "you give me a picture, I make sure you look good." It is a way to try to control their image, their career.

I don't know. What I do know is if I were famous I would much rather that than a picture of me forcing my crying kid into his stroller.

So for this, I am glad I am not famous. It is one less thing to worry about as a mom (though if I were, maybe I would know why that guy was taping us). Perhaps, some day, I will be a famous writer.

That would be lovely. But even then, while my byline may carry weight, I will still be able to roam the parks or the promenade with my messy, occasionally crying kid, carrying my own extra weight and blend in with the crowd.

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