

Hello, my name is _____

“Motherhood affords an instant identity... Gives not only identity and activity, but status and stardom of a kind.”

— BETTY ROLLINS, FORMER NEWS CORRESPONDENT AND AUTHOR

Think back to meeting new people pre-baby. After the initial hand shake, how did you respond to the question, “What do you do?” Assuming you worked, you probably answered something like, “I’m a _____” (fill in the blank with your job title, employer, or professional accreditation.) Say you’re out today without your baby, how would you answer that question? Would you respond with your old job or describe your new job as a mom? Do you identify with any of your new jobs titles like **full-time mother, homemaker, or stay-at-home mom?** This new job could click so well you feel like you’ve **always** been a mother or you could still be getting used to it. One challenge with confidently responding with your new job title is that somewhere between the 1950’s and today, the traditional work of mothers lost some respect.

The feminist movement contributed, along with other social change, to make the profession of childcare provider and homemaker somehow lower class work⁷. In our quest to prove that we were capable of much more than childbearing and rearing, we inadvertently discounted Motherwork. Society paid us to work out of the home and we accepted that as our path to equality. But men and women aren’t equal: only women can bear children and women do have a unique capacity for childrearing, especially in the early years. Even if you feel like a professional childcare worker can provide better care for your baby than you can, only you are her mother.

Someone else can do your former work and someone else can be your child’s primary caregiver; but no one else can be your child’s mother.

TIP

Dream up fun responses to the question: “What do you do?” Try “I’m on a sabbatical to expand my life skills.”

The more your identity was defined by your previous work, the harder you will probably find being on maternity leave or choosing to stay home with your baby. You don’t have to choose an all or nothing identity: one solely dominated by your role as mother or your other work in the world. Since “Mother” now holds a permanent place on your resume, it will take reflection and creativity to define **who** you are and **how** you want to work in the world.

Life is not a one act play nor do we play one role throughout our lifetime. As we grow, our identities evolve and we play more roles with a shifting emphasis: as a child, our role as a daughter and sister were primarily how we saw ourselves; as a teenager, our role as a friend; as a young career person, our role as an employee dominated our sense of self. Self-reflection is required to assimilate your role as a mother with all that shaped your pre-baby identity. There are no shortcuts.

Thoughts
