



## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Have you ever been in that situation when you are having coffee with a group of friends, chatting and gossiping, and someone asks: what do you do? You feel embarrassed and a bit shy because, unlike the others, who have exciting and demanding jobs, you stay at home and look after your children. You mutter that you are 'just a stay-at-home mother' and quickly try to move on, but you feel that the others are judging you as someone less than themselves, someone who is not really working.

How we define ourselves reflects how we feel about ourselves. The use of words and feelings are closely intertwined. If you define your role in a negative way, that is how you will feel about it and that is the image you will project to others. A term such as 'just a stay-at-home mother' is implying to others – and yourself – that staying at home is not a very demanding or valuable job.

For a father, in a world that still defines a man by the type of job he has, being seen to stay at home to help bring up children can have extremely negative connotations. A few simple words can make a big difference to the way you perceive yourself.

The power of simple words can be seen in a social experiment reported in The New Scientist. Professor John Bargh and his colleagues at New York University asked volunteers to do a mental task involving words relating to old age, such as 'wrinkled', 'grey' and 'bingo'. A second group was shown words unrelated to old age. The researchers then said the experiment was over and secretly recorded the time each participant took to walk down the long hallway to the exit. Those with old age on their mind took significantly longer to walk down the corridor.

It seems that a just a few moments' thinking time can prime you to perform either better or worse than normal at both mental and physical tasks. There is a Neuro-Linguistic Programming term for this, 'perception is projection'. How you perceive yourself is how you project yourself to others. Can you imagine what happens if you constantly define yourself in a certain negative way?

Just take a few moments for yourself and find a quiet place. Take a step back from your present everyday life and reflect how you define yourself. Notice how you feel about yourself when you say aloud your definition of what you are. For example, if you are 'just a stay-at-home mother', when you say those words aloud what impressions of yourself do you feel they give; good or bad?

The next step is to look coolly at what you do. If you are staying at home looking after children, consider what you are actually doing. Note down all the tasks you have to complete

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and the responsibilities you have to carry. Look at your diary and see how many hours you are really dedicating to parenting your children. It is not a nine-to-five job. The whole task of staying at home to look after your children looks more like a major military operation and much more demanding than your average working day.

The final step is to find words that state what you really feel about yourself. A 'stay at home mother' is not 'just' staying at home; she is directing a full-scale operation, acting in every role, ranging from managing director to office cleaner. The role is full-time and constantly changing, demanding that new skills be learnt everyday. In fact, she is a 'professional mother'. How do you think this new definition will make you feel about yourself? Is it something that you could say with pride next time you are having coffee with your working friends?

Whatever your role, be it 'stay at home mother', 'working mother', 'working father' or carer, look for a definition of that role that gives you pride in what you do. You are no longer 'just' something, you ARE something.