



Projecting motherhood

BY LISA LINTERN

"Why would a woman put a picture of her child's face – instead of her own – as her profile picture on Facebook?"

That was the question posed a few weeks ago by Katie Roiphe in her article "Disappearing mothers" in the Financial Times, when she put forward her concern that women forgo their own identity when they upload pictures of their children as their Facebook profile.

Look, I get where she is coming from. It's the 'I'm-still-the-same-intelligent-woman-I-was-before-I-had-kids' argument. I hear you sister. I really do.

But when people start suggesting that women should push their motherhood persona to the background, I start to worry because yet again I feel like someone is telling me that being a mother isn't important.

According to Katie: "...the whole idea behind Facebook is to create a social persona, an image of who you are projected into hundreds of bedrooms and cafés and offices across the country. Why would that image be of someone else, however closely bound they are to your life, genetically and otherwise?"

I'll tell you why. If I choose to upload my children's cherubic faces into that little profile box it has nothing to do with me freeing myself from "the burden of looking halfway decent for a picture". Nope, I have absolutely no problem posing for the odd photo or five.

It's about projecting a part of me that I am bloody proud of. While I am 'still-the-same-intelligent-woman-I-was-before-I-had-kids' these two little people have changed my life.

Being a parent is wonderful, overwhelming, uplifting, depressing, hilarious, stressful, expensive, enriching, and totally and utterly unrelenting. But now I'm being told that women who choose to express this via their Facebook profile are somehow letting themselves down.

Jeeze, I better let Busy-And-Important-Husband know so he can remove the photo he has proudly on display in his Facebook profile. What will people think of him? I digress...

It was hard enough being told to conceal my motherhood in the workplace. That openly discussing parenthood with professionalism could brand me 'soft'.

And it was even harder being told that I should avoid the term 'working mother' because it could suggest to others I might be prone to 'slacking off' or less serious about my career.

In fact, I find it ironic that the title of this piece is "Disappearing mothers", because the one place I do see mothers disappearing is in the workplace. Abandoning their careers as they struggle with the incompatibility of big business and parenthood. A place where the weekend's football match is often more openly discussed than the cost and quality of childcare.

So whenever it's suggested to me that mothers should tone down their maternal side, I confess it makes me angry. Angry because being a mother (and a father) is a massive job. As a result, it is a massive part of me.

And if I somehow manage to pull off this parenting thing successfully, I'm going to sing it from the roof sister.

I've said it before...if 'healthy parenting' (or lack of) is often cited as critical for a healthy society, why do eyes roll so easily when we try to speak about it? At work, at the dinner party... and now it seems on our Facebook pages.

So Katie, if we do happen to sit next to each other at a dinner party one evening, while I'm sure we will converse quite freely about news and politics...be prepared. There may also be talk of school runs, high fevers and the most effective way of managing tantrums.

Being an out and proud mother doesn't make me stupid. And it most certainly does not make me invisible.