



Nancy Mairs, author of *“Voice Lessons”* wrote: *“How do I invent an identity for myself in a society which prefers to behave as though I do not exist?”*

I couldn't agree more. This morning, while walking my dog with my friend, it came out that she feels worthless because she is *just* a homemaker.

*“Why did you quit your job?”* I asked her.

*“Because I wanted to raise my own kids and not miss anything,”* she replied.

*“What else do you do in raising them?”* I added.

*“I home school them, cook, drive them everywhere, shop, pay the bills and you know the drill,”* she confirmed.

I wasn't surprised. On one hand, she holds the typical five jobs that every American mom does (chauffeuring, shopping, managing, organizing, accounting), and on the other she feels awful about herself. In one of the stories that Nancy Mairs recounts, a woman is seen as someone who *“has a deadly weariness...she knows herself as a source; if she is not this, then she is nothing. So she gives. She gives. But with this weariness held in check and concealed...she would never willingly suffer any of it again.”*

Does it sound familiar? Men, in a patriarchal/traditional culture, are the procreators, the fathers. Women carry the babies, changes their lives accordingly to their needs, sacrifice their careers

and give endlessly.

To find one's voice in a society that doesn't value homemaking and raising children is very difficult. It is challenging to find one's identity but it's even harder to express it in a way that will make you proud the next time someone asks: "And what do YOU do for a living?"

In our binary-based culture, i.e. man/woman, good/bad, body/spirit, etc... it is all the more arduous to challenge the status quo, as the tools provided, i.e. language, historical data, etc... were created and emerge straight from men's creation (how many women worth noting do we remember from the Renaissance period or beyond? In the words of Virginia Woolf: "a woman can't possibly have thirteen children and make art." So women face a multi-facet task: that of having to carve their new identity after/and/or during raising their children, to adapt their newfound knowledge to a materialistic society, and to shift the paradigm from that of being the object of scrutiny to become the subject/author of their lives. No small feat, considering that most of our energies have been sapped by the five jobs we have held while raising our kids.

The question is: what do we do about it? The first thing should be that we learn to listen well and at length to one another; that alone will provide much needed support (similar to what one receives in AA). Secondly we need to challenge the system as it is presented to us. When at a party we are asked: "and what do you do for a living?" I suggest answering, while holding our heads high and proud: "I manage money, I organize closets, I cook for people, and I drive many important individuals around!" How does that sound for a start?

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