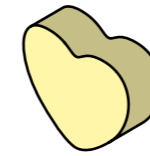


MOTHERHOOD  
IT'S NOT A  
JOB

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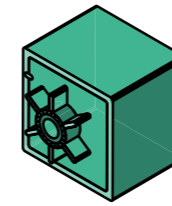
# THE 8 ROLES

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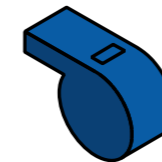
## 1 CARER

BEING THERE AND IN THE MOMENT



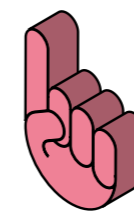
## 2 SAFEHOUSE

BEING THERE NO MATTER WHAT



## 3 COACH

BEING THERE WHEN YOU AREN'T THERE



## 4 FAN

BEING ON THE RECEIVING END  
AND ENJOYING THE MARK THEY MAKE



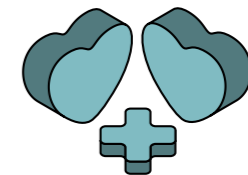
## 5 PARTNER IN CRIME

BEING DOWN AND DIRTY



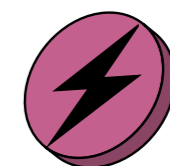
## 6 RULE BREAKER

NOT ALWAYS BEING THE DISCIPLINARIAN



## 7 FRIEND

BEING ON THE INSIDE



## 8 HERO

BEING WHO YOU WANT YOUR CHILD TO BE

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# MOTHERHOOD: IT’S NOT A JOB.

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## Introduction

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Mums spend a lot of time doing - doing the cooking, doing the washing, doing the cleaning. Doing the school runs, weekly grocery shopping, nappy changes, night-time baths, and everything in between. And yes, of course all of those things are necessary - not to say important - in bringing up children, but is that really why she chose to be a mum? To add another job to her CV and a whole list of tasks and responsibilities to her day?

As both a society and a marketing industry, we focus far too much on motherhood as a job, seeing it as a series of activities and chores. We spend money on research to understand the functional tasks mothers play throughout the day, we reformulate our products to help mums perform those tasks better, and we portray her “grafting” as a means to empathise with her. We even have a tendency to refer to motherhood as the ‘toughest job in the world’ and to mum as the ‘director of operations’ or as a ‘multi-tasking superwoman’. But, if motherhood was really that terrible with so few redeeming qualities, how come there is no shortage of women wanting to do this extraordinary ‘job’?

The truth is while marketers are busy focusing on motherhood as an activity and a job, mothers themselves are far more interested in the meaningful relationship they have with their children.

Our research found that 58% of mothers agree that “marketers treat motherhood as an activity, filled with things that I have to do, instead of a meaningful relationship with my kids.” Only 9% of those surveyed disagreed with this statement.

We decided that the time has come to turn the focus from what she does to why she does it, and to investigate what roles she is really trying to play in the lives of her children. In order to understand these we conducted a series of a week-long mobile ethnographic studies with mothers backed up with quantitative research amongst 1,022 mums across Britain. We also engaged with the Mumsnet community of nearly eight million women.

Our research uncovered the eight emotional roles that mothers want to play in the lives of their children. Roles in which mums aren’t simply providers, but part of the mutually beneficial, loving and fun-filled relationship which makes this “job” of motherhood so worthwhile.

“Brands are completely unaware of what parenting is really all about – it’s about love.

”

---

“I wouldn’t put the credit on the brands, getting stuff for children is not a great thing, spending quality time with children and giving then unconditional love is very important for a healthy relationship. Although I do agree, brands can help us spend the time more effectively with children, I feel it is the love that does everything.

”

---

1

CARER

BEING THERE AND IN THE MOMENT



- Being in tune with what your child needs day-to-day, making them feel protected, cared for and loved. And there for a hug when they need it.
- In return she gets incredible feelings of worth, being needed and reciprocal love and comfort.
- **Brand role:** Help her feel great that she is there for her children.

“  
When you become a mum you realise your kisses are ‘magic’ – they can make anything feel better.  
”

“  
When they’re sad or feeling a little bit down all you want to do is hug them and take the pain away from them, or if someone is mean to them all you want to do is hold them tight and hope that you can help them.  
”

2

SAFEHOUSE

BEING THERE NO MATTER WHAT



- Always being one phone call away, the person your child screams out “mummy” for, and providing a safety net for them to turn to, no matter what happens.
- In return she gets peace of mind that she is protecting her children from harm.
- **Brand role:** Help her be there for them when she’s needed, however old they are.

“  
This is one of the most important roles I feel, as all children need to feel they have a safe place to go and someone who will always look out for them no matter what happens.  
”

“  
I always want to be around when my daughter screams out ‘mummy’!  
”

“  
Your role is to help the child through their childhood, teenage years and beyond. I still really appreciate that my parents are there for me and would drop everything to help me if I needed it.  
”

3

COACH

BEING THERE WHEN YOU AREN'T THERE



- Being an adviser to your children, guiding and cajoling them so that they are ultimately able to live independent lives.
- In return she feels she is able to help her children (in both the short and long term) stand on their own two feet and live the lives they want.
- **Brand role:** Help support her in mentoring her children.

“  
I try to give them lessons and help them build their confidence so they can go out and be successful adults.  
”

“  
I try to teach between right and wrong – because kids don’t know that. My son said to me ‘how do you know if a stranger is good or bad?’ And I tried to teach him how to use his gut instinct and some things he could look for that would tell him.  
”

“  
It’s very important my kids understand the value of money - I am trying to teach my oldest about how to manage their personal finances. They have to work hard to earn it and know how to save it. I want them to know that before they go off in the real world.  
”

4

FAN

BEING ON THE RECEIVING END AND ENJOYING THE MARK THEY MAKE



- Being the person your child wants front-row and centre for all their performances – whether it’s a school play, football match, funny joke, or what they learned at school.
- In return she gets to sit back and enjoy her child, be amused by them, and let them entertain her.
- **Brand role:** Help her have time to be present and fully enjoy her children’s achievements.

“  
It’s about being present in the moment, not constantly on your phone.  
”

“  
Listening to them sing you a private concert, being at their dance recitals, watching them laugh at Frozen for the 100th time.  
”

# 5 PARTNER IN CRIME

BEING DOWN AND DIRTY



- Being able to play with your child - making each other laugh and spending time having genuine fun with them.
- In return, she gets to let her guard down, be silly, and genuinely have a good time.
- **Brand role:** Give her the time to let go of everything else and have fun, even if it is messy.

“  
Generally being a knob seems to entertain my kids. I love that we can laugh together.

”

“  
I do this, but not nearly enough. I get too distracted with work, life and house chores and sometimes I take things too seriously.

”

“  
Kids won't remember how clean the floors were but they will remember how much fun they had.

”

# 6 RULE BREAKER

NOT ALWAYS BEING THE DISCIPLINARIAN



- Being the person who gives your child joy by spontaneously breaking your own rules and the typical day-to-day routine.
- In return she gets to have spontaneous fun and be the one who delivers that joy to her children.
- **Brand role:** Give her permission to let go of her own rules every once in a while.

“  
I love the look in my kids' eyes when I let them break the rules – it's like 'what? Really?' – lots of excitement and I like to do that for my kids sometimes.

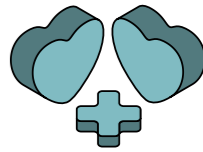
”

“  
Yesterday I let him draw on walls in the playroom – we are repainting next week so I figured why not? He couldn't believe I was letting him do it. Thought it was so fun. Was laughing the whole time!

”

# 7 FRIEND

BEING ON THE INSIDE



- Being an equal to your child by just being a mate to them and someone they can tell their secrets to.
- In return she equally gets a friend, someone to confide in and trust.
- **Brand role:** Allow her to balance being the parent with being the friend to her children.

“  
I hope at the end of it all, when she's all grown up, she wants to be my friend.

”

“  
I always tell my sons – of course I am their friend, but I am so much more than that.

”

“  
Sometimes you realise what your kids need most from you is just to be their friend.

”

# 8 HERO

BEING WHO YOU WANT YOUR CHILD TO BE



- Being your child's role model, who they look up to, and the person they are inspired by not only through what you say, but also by what you do.
- In return she feels she gets more confidence in her own sense of self, having her children look up to her, admire and respect her.
- **Brand role:** Help her be the role model she wants to be to her children knowing that may mean she sometimes has to be selfish to achieve that.

“  
You cannot underestimate how much influence your actions and character have.

”

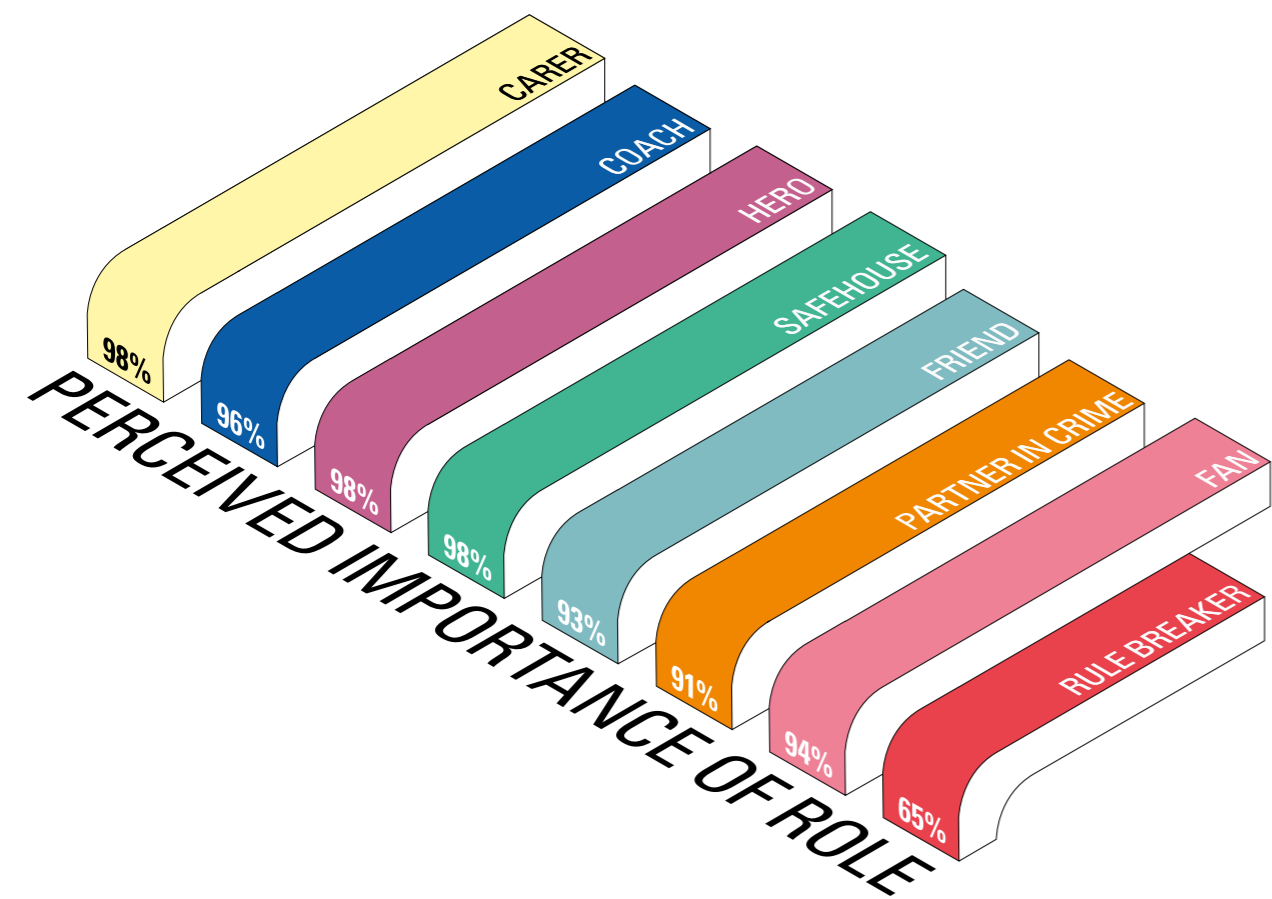
“  
So important, even when they see me mess up. They need to learn from my mistakes, what is right and wrong, and how I act.

”

“  
They won't always remember the things that I taught them, but they will remember the person I was.

”

# IMPORTANCE



We have quantified all eight roles based on importance, time spent, and desire. All roles were found to be nearly equally important and performed quite often simultaneously, depending on the children’s needs and situation at hand.

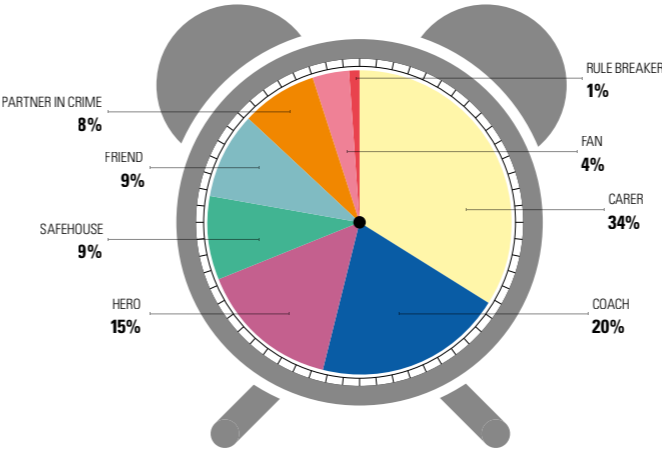
“Being a parent involves intuitively knowing what your child needs. You have to teach them at times, listen at times, give them a hug at times, be strict at times.”

## THE ROLE OF TIME:

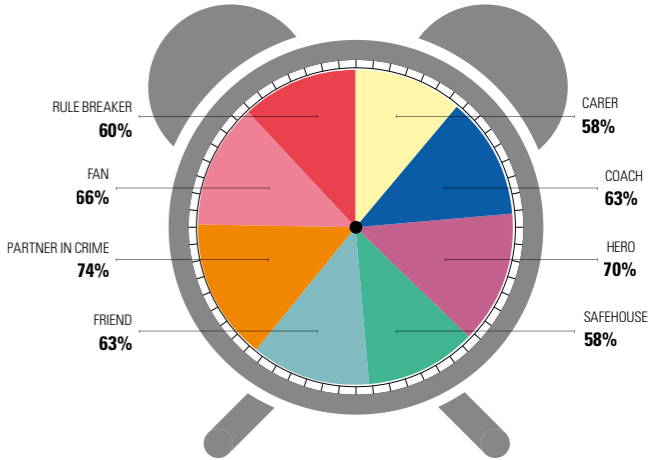
# FROM MONEY SPENT TO TIME SPENT

Nothing can replace the time mum spends with her kids – 93% say the evenings are the main time when they can be together as a family. Time is the most important and valued factor in playing these emotional roles and building her relationship with her children, and yet with everything she takes on her time is limited. If brands can give her time back in her day, then they become immensely useful to her.

“It’s about time spent, not money spent – if a brand can help me spend more time with my kids, being a mum, then that’s useful.”



ROLE MUMS CURRENTLY SPEND MOST TIME ON



ROLE MUMS WANT TO SPEND MORE TIME ON

Mums do not feel they need to spend equal time in each role, but currently there is a discrepancy between time and desire. We found that although she spends less time in the Partner in Crime, Fan, and Rule Breaker roles, she wants to do them much more.

# FROM PROVIDERS OF FUN TO PARTICIPANTS OF FUN

Mums made it clear this is not about being the ‘entertainer’ or just the provider of fun. Instead it is a craving for more genuine reciprocal fun together - the kind of spontaneous fun in which she enjoys herself as much as her children do. In fact, 93% of mums told us that they are already experiencing this kind of fun every day or at least once a week, but they definitely want more of it. 60% want to spend more time being a Rule Breaker and 74% would like to be a Partner in Crime with their child more often.

“

I just love making my children laugh and it motivates me hearing them laugh.

”

“

My kids actually entertain me so I’m grateful!

”

“

It’s just lovely watching us laugh hysterically at our silliness and messing around, and I think those are our best and valuable moments. Going back to basics, just enjoying ourselves doing silly stuff.

”

“

I wish I could spend more time having fun, to be someone a child can let their hair down with and be themselves, no matter how silly.

”

# FROM MATERNAL INSTINCTS TO PARENTAL INSTINCTS

While mums spend most of their time in the role of Carer, this role is not just innate to women. Mums told us that anybody who has primary care responsibility (e.g. dad or an extended family member) has the capacity to develop a “parental” instinct. Dads agree, with 80% of dads stating that they do not believe that only maternal instincts exist and 84% believing these instincts develop within the primary caregiver irrelevant of gender.

“

I think we need to allow men to admit to paternal instincts. Society focuses far too much on the role of women in raising children and not nearly enough on the role of fathers.

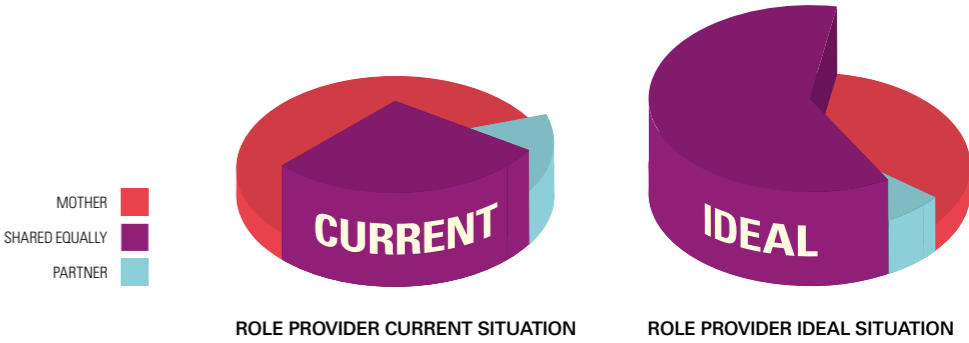
”

“

My husband has as much of a maternal instinct as I do – I saw it the second he held her.

”

Yet old stereotypes die hard and mums continue to take on the majority of parenting responsibility, with 58% of mums saying that they perform all eight of the emotional roles entirely on their own (regardless of whether they are working or stay-at-home mums). In an ideal world their partner would share 61% of all roles and responsibilities equally enabling her to be less ‘Housekeeper’ and more ‘Rule Breaker’ so that mum (not just dad) has the freedom to let go more often.



# FROM FACE-TIME DISTRACTOR TO REAL-TIME FACILITATOR

As technology continues to be an integral part of mums’ lives, it acts as a facilitator in playing these emotional roles; allows her to have fun with her kids, document and share her child’s achievements, and helps her coach her kids, among other things.

However, although most mums use technology as a partner in motherhood, they also understand its negative impact. Namely they acknowledged technology and social media can be a barrier to being present and in the moment with their children and can even have negative external influence on their children’s wellbeing. We found 71% of mums either do not allow their children to use mobile phones or the internet or put parental controls on to protect them. Additionally, 64% of mums are very concerned about the health consequences from spending too much time on electronic devices and online rather than on physical activities.

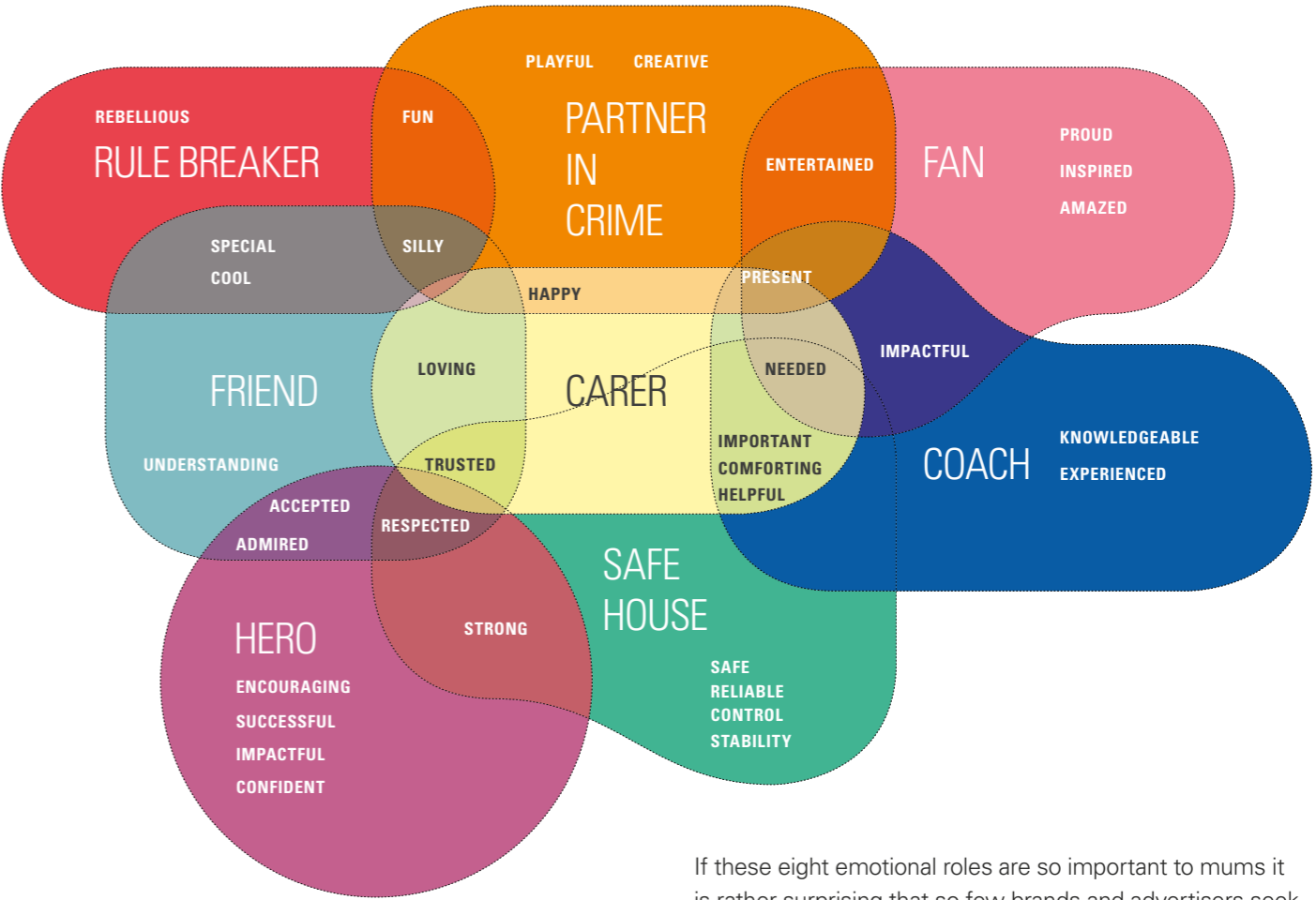
“ I worry about protecting my daughter from everything out there - inappropriate things in the media, sexually explicit songs on the radio, and/or bad videos on YouTube. ”

“ Sometimes I catch myself on my phone and not paying attention to my daughter. It’s a terrible habit! ”

“ What keeps me up at night? I worry about not being able to protect my kids. On one hand you want to protect them and on the other you know you have to let them go out and experience the world on their own. ”

# WHERE TO PLAY

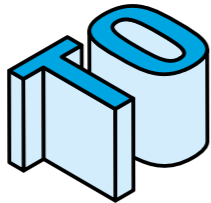
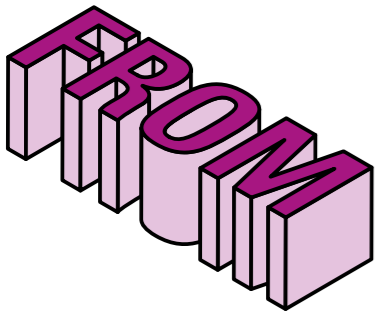
The ethnography and panel work identified 35 raw emotions that mothers were providing or experiencing in their daily behaviour and activities. We then grouped these emotions into the eight roles to distinguish what the roles provide.



If these eight emotional roles are so important to mums it is rather surprising that so few brands and advertisers seek to help mothers deliver them. And of those that do, most are content to limit their support to her role as a carer. This leaves a huge amount of uncontested emotional territory around which to engage and support Britain’s mothers, from Fan to Rule Breaker, Coach to Hero.

# CONCLUSION

As marketers we need to shift our mindset around motherhood:



Solely a provider .....	An equal beneficiary
Do-er .....	Enabler
Messages about functional roles .....	Messages about emotional needs
Child-centric .....	Mum/Child-centric
Money spent .....	Time spent
Provider of fun .....	Participant in fun
Maternal instinct .....	Parental instinct
Less homemaker .....	More Rule Breaker
Distracted by technology .....	Enabled by technology
<b>A job .....</b>	<b>A relationship</b>

Motherhood is fundamentally about being, not doing. Stop thinking about what she is doing and start understanding what she is trying to be. Above all think about the way the eight emotional roles of motherhood give your brand a powerful way to meaningfully engage with her.

After all, if your brand can enable mothers to play the roles they truly value, then that really would be a job worth doing.



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