

Kiss My Aster

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Mommy Issues

Amanda Thomsen



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I've been a working mom since the beginning. I worked while pregnant as a maintenance project manager in a large landscaping company for affluent people, taking leave on Friday and being admitted first thing Tuesday morning. After a speedy cesarean section, I went back to work, from home, immediately. I wrote so many contracts, designed so many pots and fielded so many calls (while holding my newborn and watching reruns of "Jem") that the company I worked for gave me vacation days back for later use.

Once the six weeks of maternity leave was over, Hazel was dropped into a fantastic daycare and I was back in the saddle of my company Chevy S10, feeling great about doing what it feels like I'm here to do in this life, while concurrently feeling so guilty that I cried in that truck all the way home every night.

Sadly, I'm the type of person who assigns my worthiness to how well I perform my job. I know it's some kind of psychological issue that makes me feel that my work equals worthiness. It's just so black and white at work, there's less context and less judgement. I AM GOOD AT WHAT I DO is miles easier than crowing about being a phenomenal parent.

Throughout the day, I get ZINGS of serotonin from how well I handle things, how beautiful things I design are, how easily I solve problems and—if I'm being honest—I don't really get those ZINGS from being a parent. I think because it's just so flipping ongoing. Am I right?

In this context, I really do handle the ups and downs of navigating a kid's life really well. The thing I designed? Hazel? Well, she's so cute and funny and searingly sarcastic. She's amazing (and frankly terrifying), but I rarely get that ZING. Sometimes I feel guilty for how NOT guilty I feel about being at work.

Work is where I ZING.

At home, it's like that old joke about having all your browser tabs open. I love my house—it's quite literally a shrine to me, but if I have to think or use my brain in any way that isn't auto-pilot, I'm heading to work. I can handle all the things from my hot pink velvet office chair more clearly and effectively when I'm in work mode and I wish I felt more guilty about it.

When does the guilt end? College?

When does the guilt about not feeling guilty end? The grave?

I've missed plays, parades, school events and more, and so far, she doesn't seem to place any blame. My parents never went to anything and I resented it; it seems like the difference lies in the genuine remorse I show her where my parents stuck their heads in the sand.

While I was wired from birth to feel a certain way about being a wife and mother, the line in the late '70s and '80s was that I "could do anything I put my mind to." I completely believed that was true until motherhood, when I realized it's not that I could do anything I put my mind to, it's that I was expected to do everything. I've internalized that I'm actually supposed to be good at all of it and shame on me if I'm not (or do it all but don't enjoy it).

I feel like the expectations, or lack thereof, of her generation will truly break old barriers. As of now, I feel like her people won't have the expectations of getting married and reproducing the way us Gen Xers have; they can do what they want without judgement. And I hope, with my whole heart, that she (and literally every other human being coming up in this world) doesn't equate their productivity with their worthiness.

I hope that through my own faults, the guilt and need to feel worthy, that I do my part to teach her balance, pride and accountability without the shame part. **GP**

Amanda Thomsen is a funky, punky garden writer and author now with her own store, Aster Gardens in Lemont, Illinois. Her blog is planted at KissMyAster.com and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter AND Instagram @KissMyAster.