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Good Enough

by Linda M. Clement

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Oprah recently had a group of B-A-D mothers on her show. Bad, bad mothers. Each of them felt isolated, alone and resentful – and frightened by their lack of instant bonding and permanent pleasure which they had expected to find in mothering. They felt they'd been left out of a big secret... especially after talking with other mothers, and listening to the women speaking during the show. There is a huge underground experience in motherhood – parenting in general – that is totally taboo. Naomi Wolfe uncovers the topic in her latest book, *Misconceptions – Truth, Lies, and the Unexpected on the Journey to Motherhood*. Western women have come so far from getting the communal care mothers need, and along the way picked up a whole passel of expectations that can't be lived up to.

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The women speaking on Oprah, and many parents I've encountered over the years, braved shame and scorn to speak out about the hard work, the terror, the drudgery, the isolation, the disappointment, the sense of feeling unprepared, overwhelmed, under-slept and ultimately sold a crock of bad

smelling garbage. Motherhood is not a soft-focus experience of pure delight and joy.

When I write it that way, the only response my cynical brain has is 'well, duh!' Of course no real, live experience is unbridled bliss. Life just isn't like that, and frankly it's a bit of a relief...

Fairy tales are like that. Movies are like that. TV programs are like that, but life is grotty, snotty, messy, noisy, inconvenient and unexpected, about 80% of the time. And anxiety provoking... which is a good thing.

Anxiety is a symptom of something important. It isn't a symptom of something that is important, it is a symptom that something is important to you. Anxiety washes over us when we are confronted with change, in ourselves or and in our lives. Anxiety is what makes us want, very much, to go back. To not be pregnant anymore, to not being an expectant father, to not holding that tiny life in what feel like incompetent hands... to when we never wondered if he's kind to her, or she's going to hurt him, or if they're still alive when they're five minutes late for curfew.

Back to simple, pleasurable, easy times – single and uninvolved, when we were invulnerable to being demolished by a single person's existence. Anxiety is the feeling we experience when we are growing up.

The mothers on Oprah and the parents I've spoken to are the ones who feel they're 'bad' – when what they're feeling is the let-down that is inevitable when life is more complicated than the What to Expect

books told you it would be; when it isn't clear what your instincts point you toward; when you understand the magnitude of responsibility involved in raising a child. These are the good parents.

Bad parents don't care

Bad parents don't care, aren't anxious, have no concept of the magnitude of the job and don't lie awake nights worrying that they've made some profound mistake. They are never the ones who fret about not loving their children early enough, deeply enough, truly enough. Those are only the experiences of good parents.

Good parents are those who are 'good enough' to worry, wonder, care and fret. Good enough parents are the ones who seek out new skills, learn new things, challenge their assumptions and check their results against their goals. Good parents are the only ones who are measuring their own ratings as parents.

Kinda makes you feel good about all that worrying, eh?

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