



Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity

By Andrew Solomon

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Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity By Andrew Solomon

From the National Book Award–winning author of *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression* comes a monumental new work, a decade in the writing, about family. In *Far from the Tree*, Andrew Solomon tells the stories of parents who not only learn to deal with their exceptional children but also find profound meaning in doing so.

Solomon’s startling proposition is that diversity is what unites us all. He writes about families coping with deafness, dwarfism, Down syndrome, autism, schizophrenia, multiple severe disabilities, with children who are prodigies, who are conceived in rape, who become criminals, who are transgender. While each of these characteristics is potentially isolating, the experience of difference within families is universal, as are the triumphs of love Solomon documents in every chapter.

All parenting turns on a crucial question: to what extent parents should accept their children for who they are, and to what extent they should help them become their best selves. Drawing on forty thousand pages of interview transcripts with more than three hundred families, Solomon mines the eloquence of ordinary people facing extreme challenges. Whether considering prenatal screening for genetic disorders, cochlear implants for the deaf, or gender reassignment surgery for transgender people, Solomon narrates a universal struggle toward compassion. Many families grow closer through caring for a challenging child; most discover supportive communities of others similarly affected; some are inspired to become advocates and activists, celebrating the very conditions they once feared. Woven into their courageous and affirming stories is Solomon’s journey to accepting his own identity, which culminated in his midlife decision, influenced by this research, to become a parent.

Elegantly reported by a spectacularly original thinker, *Far from the Tree* explores themes of generosity, acceptance, and tolerance—all rooted in the insight that love can transcend every prejudice. This crucial and revelatory book expands our definition of what it is to be human.

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Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity By Andrew Solomon Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best Books of the Month, November 2012: Anyone who's ever said (or heard or thought) the adage "chip off the old block" might burrow into Andrew Solomon's tome about the ways in which children are different from their parents--and what such differences do to our conventional ideas about family. Ruminative, personal, and reportorial all at once, Solomon--who won a National Book Award for his treatise on depression, *The Noonday Demon*--begins by describing his own experience as the gay son of heterosexual parents, then goes on to investigate the worlds of deaf children of hearing parents, dwarves born into "normal" families, and so on. His observations and conclusions are complex and not easily summarized, with one exception: The chapter on children of law-abiding parents who become criminals. Solomon rightly points out that this is a very different situation indeed: "to be or produce a schizophrenic...is generally deemed a misfortune," he writes. "To...produce a criminal is often deemed a failure." Still, parents must cope with or not, accept or not, the deeds or behaviors or syndromes of their offspring. How they do or do not do that makes for fascinating and disturbing reading. --*Sara Nelson*

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Solomon, who won the National Book Award for *The Noonday Demon* (2001), tackles daunting questions involving nature versus nurture, illness versus identity, and how they all affect parenting in his exhaustive but not exhausting exploration of what happens when children bear little resemblance to their parents. He begins by challenging the very concept of human reproduction. We do not reproduce, he asserts, spawning clones. We produce originals. And if we're really lucky, our offspring will be enough like us or our immediate forebears that we can easily love, nurture, understand, and respect them. But it's a crapshoot. More often than not, little junior will be born with a long-dormant recessive gene, or she may emerge from the womb with her very own, brand-new identifier—say, deafness, physical deformity, or homosexuality. Years of interviews with families and their unique children culminate in this compassionate compendium. Solomon focuses on the creative and often desperate ways in which families manage to tear down prejudices and preconceived fears and reassemble their lives around the life of a child who alters their view of the world. Most succeed. Some don't. But the truth Solomon writes about here is as poignant as it is implacable, and he leaves us with a reinvented notion of identity and individual value. --*Donna Chavez*

Review

"[These] stories are entirely unpredictable and offer us the full range of human experience—not only the horror but also the astonishing beauty—and in the end a Shakespearean sense that we are such stuff as dreams are made of." (Judith Newman More)

"Profoundly moving...Solomon's own trials of feeling marginalized as gay, dyslexic, and depressive, while still yearning to be a father, frame these affectingly rendered real tales about bravely playing the cards one's dealt." (Publishers Weekly, starred review)

"An informative and moving book that raises profound issues regarding the nature of love, the value of human life, and the future of humanity." (Kirkus, starred review)

"It's a book everyone should read and there's no one who wouldn't be a more imaginative and understanding parent—or human being—for having done so." (Julie Myerson *The New York Times Book Review*)

"Solomon is a storyteller of great intimacy and ease...He approaches each family's story thoughtfully, respectfully...Bringing together their voices, Solomon creates something of enduring warmth and beauty: a

quilt, a choir.” (Kate Tuttle The Boston Globe)

“Solomon’s first chapter, entitled ‘Son,’ is as masterly a piece of writing as I’ve come across all year. It combines his own story with a taut and elegant précis of this book’s arguments. It is required reading...This is a book that shoots arrow after arrow into your heart.” (Dwight Garner The New York Times)

“A brave, beautiful book that will expand your humanity.” (Anne Leslie PEOPLE)

“[*Far from the Tree*] is a masterpiece of non-fiction, the culmination of a decade’s worth of research and writing, and it should be required reading for psychologists, teachers, and above all, parents...A bold and unambiguous call to redefine how we view difference...A stunning work of scholarship and compassion.” (Carmela Ciuraru USA Today)

“Deeply moving...” (Lisa Zeidner The Washington Post)

“A book of extraordinary ambition...Part journalist, part psychology researcher, part sympathetic listener, Solomon’s true talent is a geographic one: he maps the strange terrain of the human struggle that is parenting.” (Brook Wilensky-Lanford The San Francisco Chronicle)

“Monumental...Solomon has an extraordinary gift for finding his way into the relatively hermetic communities that form around conditions...and gaining the confidence of the natives.” (Lev Grossman TIME)

“Masterfully written and brilliantly researched...*Far from the Tree* stands apart from the countless memoirs and manuals about special needs parenting published in the last couple of decades.” (Tina Calabro Pittsburgh Post-Gazette)

“A careful, subtle, and surprising book.” (Nathan Heller The New Yorker)

“*Far from the Tree* is fundamentally about the bonds and burdens of family, and it’s a huge valentine to those who embrace the challenge of raising children who are in some way not what they had hoped for.” (Virginia Vitzthum ELLE)

“A behemoth worth every one of its 976 pages.” (Amy Boaz Publishers Weekly)

“Years of interviews with families and their unique children culminate in this compassionate compendium...The truth Solomon writes about here is as poignant as it is implacable, and he leaves us with a reinvented notion of identity and individual value.” (Booklist)

“In *Far from the Tree*, Andrew Solomon reminds us that nothing is more powerful in a child’s development than the love of a parent. This remarkable new book introduces us to mothers and fathers across America—many in circumstances the rest of us can hardly imagine—who are making their children feel special, no matter what challenges come their way.” (President Bill Clinton)

“This is one of the most extraordinary books I have read in recent times—brave, compassionate and astonishingly humane. Solomon approaches one of the oldest questions—how much are we defined by nature versus nurture?—and crafts from it a gripping narrative. Through his stories, told with such masterful delicacy and lucidity, we learn how different we all are, and how achingly similar. I could not put this book down.” (Siddhartha Mukherjee, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Emperor of All Maladies*)

“Far-reaching, original, fascinating—Andrew Solomon’s investigation of many of the most intense challenges that parenthood can bring compels us all to reexamine how we understand human difference.

Perhaps the greatest gift of this monumental book, full of facts and full of feelings, is that it constantly makes one think, and think again.” (Philip Gourevitch, author of *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families*)

“Solomon, a highly original student of human behavior, has written an intellectual history that lays the foundation for a 21st century Psychological Bill of Rights. In addition to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness on the basis of race and religion, this Bill extends inalienable rights of psychological acceptance to people on the basis of their identity. He provides us with an unrivalled educational experience about identity groups in our society, an experience that is filled with insight, empathy and intelligence. We also discover the redefining, self-restructuring nature that caring for a child produces in parents, no matter how unusual or disabled the child is. Reading *Far from the Tree* is a mind-opening experience.” (Eric Kandel, author of *The Age of Insight* and winner of the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine)

“Andrew Solomon has written a brave and ambitious work, bringing together science, culture and a powerful empathy. Solomon tells us that we have more in common with each other—even with those who seem anything but normal—than we would ever have imagined.”— (Malcolm Gladwell, author of *Blink* and *The Tipping Point*)

? “*Far from the Tree* is a landmark, revolutionary book. It frames an area of inquiry—difference between parents and children—that many of us have experienced in our own lives without ever considering it as a phenomenon. Andrew Solomon plumbs his topic thoroughly, humanely, and in a compulsively readable style that makes the book as entertaining as it is illuminating.” (Jennifer Egan, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *A Visit from the Goon Squad*)

“That human beings are resilient in the face of extreme circumstances, have a remarkable capacity to adapt, and summon the power of love to surmount daunting conditions are eternal truths made vivid in Solomon’s *Far from the Tree*.” (Jerome Groopman *The New York Review of Books*)

“The stories collected in *Far from the Tree* attest to the fact that in the netherworlds of parenting lie tremendous hardships, as well as the potential for remarkable insight and meaning.” (Rachel Adams *The Los Angeles Times Book Review*)

“A book to admire, learn from, and cherish.” (Sue Ransohoff *The Christian Science Monitor*)

“A brilliant and humane examination of family and resilience and humility and confusion and loyalty and difference and love...I want everyone to read it.” (Elizabeth Gilbert, author of *Eat Pray, Love* and *Committed*)

“A marvel of precision, lucidity and, despite its 962 pages, concision...This book will change your view of your own species.” (Tanguy Chouard *Nature*)

“A marvel of precision, lucidity and, despite its 962 pages, concision...This book will change your view of your own species.” (Tanguy Chouard *Nature*)

“The most amazing book I’ve ever read...” (Curtis Sittenfeld, author of *Prep* and *Sisterland*)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jose York:

Reading a reserve tends to be new life style with this era globalization. With reading through you can get a lot of information that could give you benefit in your life. Having book everyone in this world can certainly share their idea. Guides can also inspire a lot of people. Plenty of author can inspire their particular reader with their story or maybe their experience. Not only the story that share in the textbooks. But also they write about the ability about something that you need example of this. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your young ones, there are many kinds of book which exist now. The authors nowadays always try to improve their proficiency in writing, they also doing some exploration before they write with their book. One of them is this Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity.

Roger Sowa:

Reading can called brain hangout, why? Because if you find yourself reading a book especially book entitled Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity the mind will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in most aspect that maybe mysterious for but surely will become your mind friends. Imaging just about every word written in a guide then become one application form conclusion and explanation this maybe you never get ahead of. The Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity giving you a different experience more than blown away the mind but also giving you useful facts for your better life in this era. So now let us present to you the relaxing pattern at this point is your body and mind will likely be pleased when you are finished reading it, like winning a game. Do you want to try this extraordinary shelling out spare time activity?

Travis McDonald:

In this age globalization it is important to someone to get information. The information will make anyone to understand the condition of the world. The fitness of the world makes the information simpler to share. You can find a lot of recommendations to get information example: internet, paper, book, and soon. You can observe that now, a lot of publisher that will print many kinds of book. The actual book that recommended to you personally is Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity this guide consist a lot of the information from the condition of this world now. This particular book was represented how does the world has grown up. The vocabulary styles that writer make usage of to explain it is easy to understand. The writer made some analysis when he makes this book. Here is why this book ideal all of you.

Deon Henderson:

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