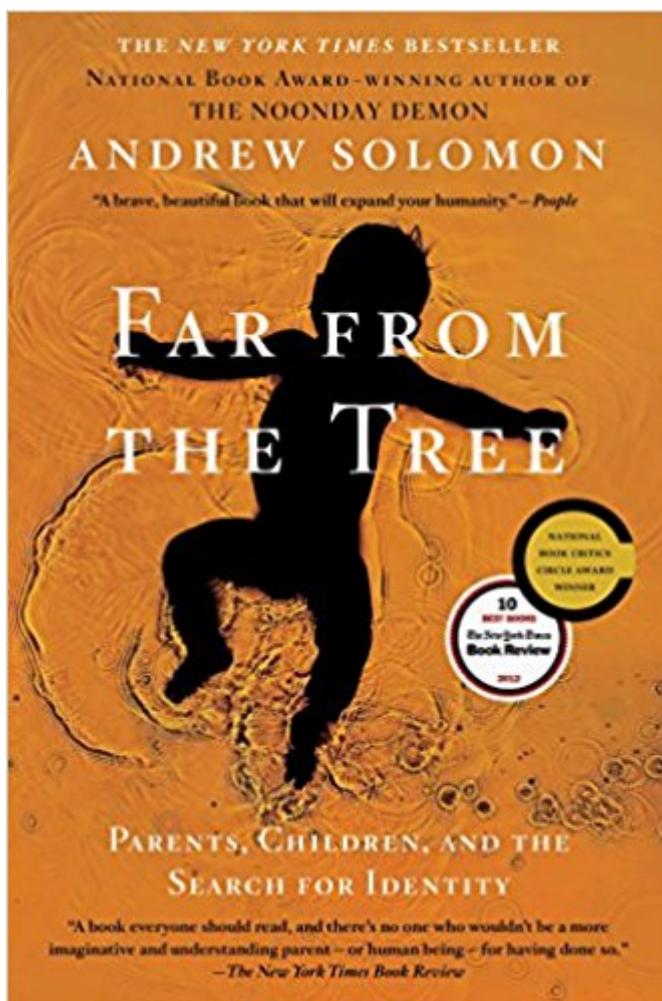


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# Far From The Tree: Parents, Children And The Search For Identity



## Synopsis

Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award, a Books for a Better Life Award, and one of The New York Times Book Review's Ten Best Books of 2012, this masterpiece by the National Book Award-winning author of *The Noonday Demon* features stories of parents who not only learn to deal with their exceptional children, but also find profound meaning in doing so. A brave, beautiful book that will expand your humanity. (People) Solomon's startling proposition is that being exceptional is at the core of the human condition: "that difference is what unites us. He writes about families coping with deafness, dwarfism, Down syndrome, autism, schizophrenia, or 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, and Solomon documents triumphs of love over prejudice in every chapter. All parenting turns on a crucial question: to what extent should parents accept their children for who they are, and to what extent they should help them become their best selves. Drawing on ten years of research and interviews with more than three hundred families, Solomon mines the eloquence of ordinary people facing extreme challenges. Elegantly reported by a spectacularly original and compassionate thinker, *More Perfect Union* explores how people who love each other must struggle to accept each other—a theme in every family's life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Best Books of the Month, November 2012: Anyone who's ever said (or heard or thought) the

adage à oechip off the old blockâ • might burrow into Andrew Solomonâ™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 à œnormalâ • 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: à œto be or produce a schizophrenic...is generally deemed a misfortune,â • he writes. à œTo...produce a criminal is often deemed a failure.â • 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 --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

\*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 weâ™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 itâ™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 identifierâ "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 donâ™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 --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Far From the Tree is a TOME. I mean, it's a great big, heavy book in every sense of the word. To be honest, I was a little intimidated when my copy arrived! I didn't read it cover to cover, but started with the autism chapter because it was relevant to our family. I found it to be a very well-researched,

sensitive look at how autism can affect a parent's life, hopes, and perceptions. That chapter was so good, I moved to the crime chapter and stayed up way too late because I could not put it down. Thank you, Mr. Solomon for pointing out the absurdities in our justice system when it comes to dealing with juvenile crime. (And as for the reviewer who questioned including crime at all, this book focuses on any possible way that a child can turn out different than their parents expected, and being guilty of a crime definitely seems appropriate to me.) I learned a lot from this chapter, and was particularly fascinated by the Klebolds' story. Once again, Solomon wrote with sensitivity about a very difficult and controversial topic. From there I read the chapter on dwarfism, and then finally turned to the first pages of the book and started reading the beginning! I wanted to learn about how families deal with a diagnosis of autism; instead I learned about how families deal with all kinds of unexpected outcomes, how resilient parents can be when faced with hardships, and how connected are the identities of parents and their children. As a parent, I understand the constant struggle to balance who we want our children to be and who they actually are. "There is no such thing as reproduction" may be my new mantra. One more thing: in 700 pages (okay, I admit, I didn't read the Acknowledgments) I never found an example of "martyrdom" that one reviewer complained about. The book relates honest responses from parents in the trenches. Parenting isn't always fun, even for parents of kids who have no extra challenges. But Far From the Tree isn't a chronicle of long-suffering devastated parents; there are plenty of positive, hopeful, make-the-best-of-it moments as well. It's a fascinating book for anyone interested in parenting, psychology, or the history of disability. Highly recommended.

A book he was born to write. This is a 900 page book, 700 of which are reading pages, the rest notes and index. It is a rational and helpful thesis and there is research quoted. But most of the book is based upon very thorough and careful interviews which lead you to wonder about the depths of the mystery of being human and of consciousness, and about the depths of compassion that "ordinary" people develop when they have an "extraordinary" challenge. Yoga teachers are often saying, "Open your heart." Well, this book does. Andrew Solomon is an excellent writer. Even with medical and forensic research information being shared, he is very clear. It is not always easy to read, emotionally or intellectually. Lots of concentration is required BUT that said, it is like going to grad school for pleasure....the deep pleasure of learning and thinking because you want to. Even if our own challenges from our "vertical" family are just the average ones, the ability to perceive and validate "horizontal" identity in others is an important insight we all can work with....even with 'temporary' ones like "teenager." Every physician, every educator should "have to" read it. May it

become an undergraduate classic. May many many people read it now out of interest and in the interest of awareness, of their neighbors challenges. If we are more open to understanding in these ways, we won't have so much to fear (and shun). This book deserves all its awards but more importantly it deserves to be widely read, and for a long time. May it be translated into many languages, so we all have another shared language to explore answers to the fundamental and important questions extraordinary people bring to the lives of families and communities. Thank you Mr. Solomon, for your good work.

Probably one of the most substantial and provocative books I have ever read! It's about people who have begotten "different" children and what those children are like. More importantly, it discusses at length what having those children does to the parents, sibs, economics, extended family and society in general. Slow read as I found myself having to put the book down and think about what I had just read. This author is always brilliant. Would strongly suggest his whole body of work.

How do we raise children who are profoundly different than we are? This is the question posed by award-winning writer Andrew Solomon in "Far From The Tree." How do parents deal with raising a child who isn't what they expected him or her to be? What if the child is autistic? Deaf? Has Down Syndrome? And how much does nurture have to do with the people our children become? Or is it more due to nature? Solomon began writing this book twelve years ago, after attending a protest of deaf students who opened his eyes to seeing people with 'differences' as not having disabilities, but having their own unique gifts. He follows the lives of many families who are faced with the challenge of raising children who are profoundly different than they expected them to be. Each of these stories reveals in their own way the nature of humanity, the unconditional love of parents for their children, and the desire for all humans to be valued as individuals. Solomon also shines a spotlight on his own upbringing. The gay son of heterosexual parents, who was also dyslexic and bullied for not conforming to the stereotypical expectations of what a typical male should be, Solomon reveals how he overcame his insecurities to not only accept himself, but to decide to become a father.

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