



Shadow Daughter: A Memoir of Estrangement

Harriet Brown

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A riveting, provocative, and ultimately hopeful exploration of mother-daughter estrangement, woven with research and anecdotes, from an award-winning journalist.

The day of her mother's funeral, Harriet Brown was five thousand miles away. To say that Harriet and her mother had a difficult relationship is a wild understatement; the older Harriet grew, the more estranged they became. By the time Harriet's mom died at age 76, they were out of contact. Yet Harriet felt her death deeply, embarking on an exploration of what family estrangement means--to those who cut off contact, to those who are estranged, to the friends and family members who are on the sidelines.

Shadow Daughter tackles a subject we rarely discuss as a culture: family estrangements, especially those between parents and adult children. Estrangements--between parents and children, siblings, multiple generations--are surprisingly common, and even families that aren't officially estranged often have some experience of deep conflicts. Estrangement is an issue that touches most people, one way or another, one that's still shrouded in secrecy, stigma, and shame. In addition to her personal narrative, Harriet employs interviews with others who are estranged, as well as the most recent research on family estrangement, for a brave exploration of this taboo topic. Ultimately, *Shadow Daughter* is a thoughtful, deeply researched, and provocative exploration of the ties that bind and break, forgiveness, reconciliation, and what family really means.

Shadow Daughter: A Memoir of Estrangement Details

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From Reader Review Shadow Daughter: A Memoir of Estrangement for online ebook

Ellen Murland says

Shadow Daughter is a fascinating and riveting look at the issue of familial estrangement. The author's own story of estrangement is interwoven amongst the many stories of her interviewees. This book describes the many forms that estrangement can take, its costs as well as its payoffs. It is ultimately a book about love, heartbreak and the resilience of the human spirit. Whether or not the issue of estrangement is something you have grappled with personally, this book has something to teach us all about human relationships and being part of a family.

Kayo says

Sad, and a bit heartbreak. Cried because it hits close to home.

Thanks to author, publisher and Netgalley for the chance to read this book. While I got the book for free, it had no bearing on the rating I gave it

Nicki says

all I can bring myself to say abt this book is: big mood lol

Tatiana says

Not exactly a memoir, more of an essay. The narrative is broken and repetitive. I wish it was more like Mary Karr's Liars Club style, not so much a constant citation of studies and different cases of estrangement.

Jackie says

Harriet Brown is one of the millions of people who grapple with familial estrangement. In this book, she gives compelling credence to the fact that estrangement is sometimes the healthiest option. Witness the cruel, narcissistic parents who can't see their child as a separate human being- they look upon said child as an extension of themselves.

Of course, there are always two sides to the causes of estrangement. Perhaps the adult child is spoiled, ungrateful, etc.,. Nonetheless, estrangements are a real part of family dynamics no matter their cause.

SundayAtDusk says

Family estrangement is an interesting topic, but remind me never to read another book on it by an author who is obsessed with her own estrangement issues. “Obsessed” is not too strong a word, either, in my opinion. By the time I reached the final chapter, I did not want to ever read another word about Harriet Brown’s mommy issues. She even brings up the Holocaust in the next to the last chapter, while stating: “I’m not advocating for comparing family conflicts to genocide, of course.” And I’m not sure that is a totally truthful statement.

Ms. Brown was the oldest daughter of a narcissistic mother, a family role that is usually extremely difficult, to say the least, since the mother often projects her own guilt and self-condemnations on to that daughter. Yet the author got away from her mother at 16, but emotionally never seemed to get away from her mother. She seems to be a proponent of the idea that one can be permanently damaged by things that happened in early childhood, as well as a believer that there is a resilient gene some people have and some people don’t. Harriet Brown obviously did not get that useful gene. For she appears to have spent her entire adult life, or most of it, playing hurt child because she wasn’t lovingly mothered.

This is not to disregard the pain of having a narcissistic mother, and a father who just stands by doing nothing about the unfairness of it all, but you don’t spend your whole adult life going around in circles about the matter. I began to wonder if there wasn’t a reason the author basically ignored the presence of alcohol or other substance abuse in so many family estrangements. Nothing keeps everyone on the hamster wheel like alcohol or drugs. Of course, mental illness does, too, and Ms. Brown does not ignore that topic, but her mother is the only one seen as mentally ill in the family. Moreover, the author’s apparent belief that almost all estrangement between parents and adult children is the parent’s fault, is just the “hurt child” in her ignoring the reality of many family estrangements.

(Note: I received a free ARC of this book from Amazon Vine.)

Ramona Mead says

This book resonated with every cell in my body. If you have never experienced or considered family estrangement, much of what the author has to say may be difficult to understand. The research Brown has done, along with other studies she cites throughout the book, is enlightening and comforting to those of us who come from families dealing with estrangement.

Brown shares the story of her own estrangement from her mother with honesty and grace. I can only imagine how painful yet cathartic it was for her to complete this book. Her personal anecdotes are woven with research and interviews, which come together to create a heart wrenching story, as well as an excellent resource for others.

I will return to this book again and again for strategies on handling family trauma, as well as reassurance that my family and I are not alone in our pain.

Many thanks to NetGalley for my advanced copy, which I received in exchange for my honest review.

Zhuo Zhang says

After reading "Brave Girl Eating", I started to pay attention to the books written by this author. This book is a little heartbreaking because almost eight out of nine chapters, the author was narrating the the estrangement with abundant examples. Yes, she did a lot of research writing this book, but I am a little lost in the point that the author tries to make.

Kim says

While I felt the book relied too heavily on one particular source in its analysis, the author's own story was compelling and I identified with a lot she had to say. I am going to have to read her chapter on forgiveness again. It's given me a lot to think about.

Lynda says

This book is especially timely for me, and I read it with a lot of interest about how others have dealt with estrangement from their "loved one(s)," and some of the hows and whys and what happened to them. I have a lot of thoughts about this book, and how honest the author was about her own thoughts on the subject and the dealings with her mother and father and sister and extended family, as well as the experience of others who have experienced this.

There's no real happy ending, but I was sort of disappointed in an odd way, even though I know that's how life works. I'm glad that I have an appointment tomorrow with my own psychologist and will discuss my thoughts on this book and the subject in general.

I think I'll use this book as a jumping off point to read more about family relationships and estrangements (total and partial, temporary and permanent), but not just yet, in order to give my active thoughts on this book to settle.

Definitely recommended for anyone who has considered estrangement or lives with estrangement whether it was their choice or not.

Linda Edmonds cerullo says

An honest and painful memoir of a woman who endured a strained relationship with her mother for years before finally, in an attempt to preserve her emotional and mental health, became estranged from her. While I've read some reviews of "Shadow Daughter" that were critical of Harriet Brown, it is clear that her estrangement with her mother was not done without thought. As with many cases like this, it is not a single moment that causes the rift, but a multitude of difficulties through many years that ultimately cause someone to cut the ties. I would not judge Harriet for her decision and I think writing this book is a blessing for many people. Most would say that "dirty laundry" should not be aired. I disagree. For many people in similar situations it is as if she threw a lifeline. No one wants to believe that they are the only one with parental issues. At the same time there are few groups one can join to help "talk it out" with others. Harriet has done

not only herself, but many of us a favor. She offers stories and situations from other people who have also broken ties, but ultimately this is her story. From the intrusive questions of others who are appalled that anyone could be estranged from a parent, to people who understand but choose to take the side of the toxic parent, to how her father handled the estrangement after her mother passed (even chillingly commenting that she should have understood that her mother wanted to always be right and just accepted it), this is all valid, important information that would do no one any good were it swept under the rug. I hope Harriet can find healing in sharing her story and others can be helped by the advice she gives and by, at the very least, knowing they are not alone.

Janilyn Kocher says

Shadow Daughter is about estrangement from family. The author reveals her story throughout the chapters as well as others she interviewed. Brown eventually had to walk away from both her parents because a relationship was too stressful. Eventually her mother dies and she rebuilds a different relationship with her father. It's a sad subject, but sometimes a person has to walk away in order to protect herself. Anyone who has doubts about cutting ties and reads this book will find the permission they seek within its chapters. Thanks to NetGalley for the read.

Monika says

Harriet Brown's *Shadow Daughter: A Memoir of Estrangement* is more than her own memoir. Brown shares her own story of being estranged from her mother in bits and pieces, surrounded by personal stories from a variety of people (some estranged by choice, others not), as well as research into the psychology and social impact of being estranged from family—why it happens, how it feels, and more.

This format works really, really well. This is a tough topic because of intense “family first” social norms and ideas around “forgiveness” that often end up pressuring people into accepting abuse, especially covert abuse. The way Brown has laid out her book makes the presentation of personal stories powerful, while giving just enough distance so the reading doesn’t become too overwhelming emotionally for those who have been/are going through family estrangement.

Brown also takes a deeper look at forgiveness—what it is, what it isn’t, what it means, what it doesn’t. But she doesn’t try to present a definitive answer. Instead, she offers up a number of perspectives for readers to think about on their own.

It’s important to note that *Shadow Daughter* covers all sorts of reasons for estrangement, and doesn’t play the “pain Olympics” in any way. It’s quite validating, and truly a healing read.

Pamela Reilly says

A nonfiction description of the experience of estrangement with a touch of poetry. Harriet Brown writes beautifully combining her experience with others' to illuminate this difficult problem. Her story is described with heartbreakingly specificity but will lead you past the heartbreak to look at the problem as many people experience it and potential ways to live with it. She is definitely not suggesting a one-size-fits-all answer -

Brown treats this timely topic with appropriate delicacy and fortitude, much like her other books. This is a book for anyone who has considered the concept of family.
