



Mean Mothers: Overcoming the Legacy of Hurt

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An exploration of the darker side of maternal behavior drawn from scientific research, psychology, and the real-life experiences of adult daughters, Mean Mothers sheds light on one of the last cultural taboos: what happens when a woman doesn't or can't love her daughter.

Mean Mothers reveals the multigenerational thread that often runs through these stories—many unloving mothers are the daughters of unloving or hypercritical women—and explores what happens to a daughter's sense of self and to her relationships when her mother is emotionally absent or even cruel. But Mean Mothers is also a narrative of hope, recounting how daughters can get past the legacy of hurt to become whole within and to become loving mothers to the next generation of daughters. The personal stories of unloved daughters and sons and those of the author herself, are both unflinching and moving, and bring this most difficult of subjects to life.

Mean Mothers isn't just a book for daughters who've had difficult or impossible relationships with their mothers. By exposing the myths of motherhood that prevent us from talking about the women for whom mothering a daughter is fraught with ambivalence, tension, or even jealousy, Mean Mothers also casts a different light on the extraordinary influence mothers have over their female children as well as the psychological complexity and emotional depth of the mother-daughter relationship.

Mean Mothers: Overcoming the Legacy of Hurt Details

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From Reader Review Mean Mothers: Overcoming the Legacy of Hurt for online ebook

Wendy says

I was excited to read the synopsis of this book - even the title alone - as it is a taboo subject but one I can closely relate to.

So as soon as the book arrived from Amazon I started reading, box of tissues ready just in case and ok, a box of chocolates too. I rushed through the foreword eagerly and then the first chapter. By page 58, I realised this wasn't going to be the book I'd hoped for.

I sense the author had difficulties finding real life daughters of mean mothers as the examples lacked depth. In fact, everything seemed glossed over as though the author wanted to write an academic paper comprehensively covering the subject (the bibliography and index take up more than 30 pages).

I felt there was as much discussion of good mothers, maybe more, than mean mothers. In fact, did I recall even reading about any particularly mean mothers? Not really. Self absorbed maybe, thoughtless yes. But the examples were never longer than a few lines.

As another reviewer said, it would make for an interesting book club conversation as it brings up the topic, and yes it introduces research and other books on motherhood.

If you find another book that reads like the synopsis here, please let me know the title.

This is not a bad book by any means. Just not what I was hoping for.

1verylovedmom says

I read the description on Amazon and after reading the reviews was very excited for the book to arrive. By chapter 2 I realized that this book was not going to be what I hoped for.

The author basically gathered information from other authors and quoted them and minimal sprinkled in experiences from daughters of unloved/mean mothers. While I related to how these women felt growing up and their struggles with relationships as adults I did not find the answers I hoped for or were promised. Don't get me wrong it was nice to know I wasn't alone and it didn't have anything to do with me. I was looking for answers and solutions. I want to be free of my mother's voice in my head. This book really offered no solutions. It read more like a research paper to me.

I do feel I gained some insight but not worth the amount I spent on the book. I definitely feel like there are better books on the market.

Launa says

Sometimes you come across something that touches you in deep and necessary ways...even when you aren't looking for them. This book did that for me. I happened to stumble across it in the Kindle store and ended up borrowing a copy from my local library. It spoke to me as a daughter, but more importantly to me as a mother to a daughter. Lots of food for thought :)

Rachael says

This is really astounding. A must read-regardless of your relationship to your mother. For those of us who have unloving/borderline abusive mothers, this will help you deal and really reflect in ways I can't describe. For those who have a good relationship, this will make you feel so much better about your mother, and possibly give you some insight about what some of us are going through.

It's an odd phenomenon, the unloving mother. Do actually experience it is awful, but to know that I'm not alone and that it really isn't my fault that my mother is the way she is was one of the best feelings I could ever have. I really recommend this book to everyone.

Jurate Stanaityte says

I'll just leave a quote that attests to the value of this book:

"Nowadays, getting out of the way—making sure it's not about me—is easier in some ways and harder in others. I asked my daughter, as I was writing this, in what ways I had sometimes failed and what she needed from me now, as she approached twenty-one. Her answer had all the clarity of truth: "I need you to simply keep accepting me as who I am, and to support my actions as I come into my own light. I sometimes feel that you expect me to react to situations in the same way you do, and that I sometimes fall short."

Nilchance says

Not so helpful at "overcoming the legacy of hurt" so much as a statement that yeah, some mothers are mean, and it sucks that people don't often believe this. I actually got some side-eye from my mother-in-law for reading this book ("oh, is it about me? do you think I'm mean?") as an interesting meta-comment on Streep's main point. It would have been better marketed as a survey of women from abusive mothers than a vaguely self-help book on how to cope with having had an abusive mother; did the publisher not realize that women who wanted to overcome the hurt did not need a multi-chapter discussion on the fact that the hurt exists despite cultural ideas about maternal instincts? idk.

Meredith says

Was a little disappointed with this book and found myself skimming and sipping certain sections. Being the daughter of a narcissistic mother I had hoped to find more in this book to relate to. There were a few examples that I could relate to but for the most part the book did not find the book to provide that much insight or information.

Jen Johnson says

This is a really emotionally draining read, but very informative and easy to read. It brought tears to my eyes several times. Highly recommend if the subject is of interest to you.

Rachel Brady says

Here is a book for women raised by emotionally absent mothers. Peg Streep draws on scientific research, interviews, and personal stories to suggest reasons why unloving mothers might be the way that they are. She stresses the importance of approaching these questions from a multi-generational angle. Most importantly, care is taken to explain how damaged mother-daughter relationships affect the psychological make-up of the daughters. Streep discusses a wide range of emotional unavailability and expounds on what this means for unmothered daughters when they grow up and have kids, particularly daughters, of their own.

The sibling relationship is also examined and explanations are offered for why children from the same family often have wildly different stories about their childhoods and about what kind of people their parents were. Streep points out that some mothers are emotionally available to some children, but not all, and she describes how this factors into the sibling bonds or lack thereof.

The entire presentation is both fascinating and validating. If any part of this summary resonates with you, there is something for you in this book.

Diane says

This title caught my attention several months ago, and I knew it was one book I really wanted to read, having been raised by a mother who was emotionally detached, and often verbally abusive.

In this well researched book, Peg Streep, examines type of mothering that often is not spoken about: "Mean Mothers", and that they do in fact exist. Through scientific research and case studies of adult daughters of unloving and overly critical mothers, the author provides insight as to why some women are just not capable of nurturing their children -- especially their daughters. It isn't just physical abuse, emotional abuse can be just as damaging. The author points out how daughters who are denied closeness, loving gestures and positive reinforcement from their mothers can develop negative self-images, and compulsive behaviors like overeating, overspending and overachieving. Emotional connection and closeness is something that is learned during infancy and childhood. If raised in such a way that a child becomes emotionally detached, and this is not addressed as adults, future relationships are apt to suffer.

The author was a product of such a mother....."I was no older than three or four when I knew my mother didn't love me. Of course, the way in which I knew this was different from how I would know and understand it at other times in my life, but I knew it nonetheless. I knew it first by the way she stiffened when I tried to sit in her lap or touch her arm, and how she turned her face away when I kissed her. She

wasn't like the people who loved me – my father, my grandfather, my great-aunt, or even my teachers – whose faces softened with pleasure when I drew near. "

One of the women interviewed by the author, hit particularly close to home for me (Sarah fifty-two)...."I learned not to ask my mother for anything because she never gave anything freely. There were always strings attached. Holidays associated with family and closeness and even my own birthday were always hard for me and still are. I approach them with low expectations and I am always ready to be disappointed because I always was with my mother. I have trouble asking for help from people, especially women because of my mother's inability to give....."

MY THOUGHTS - Although, perhaps a bit too theory based, I did find a lot of this book very interesting. If your childhood was perfect in every way, then there is no need for you to read this book. If not, then many women might gain a better understanding of why your mother was the way she was when you were growing up. You can breathe easy, since not every daughter who is the product of a "mean mother", will become a "mean mother" herself. It takes work to move beyond the cycle of hurt that some wounded women have experienced, but it is possible to heal and to forgive. **RECOMMENDED**

Travel Writing says

I so enjoy Peg Streep's articles on Psychology Today and find her to be an accessible and empathetic writer.

I actually had purchased Mean Mother's in 2011 and could never bring myself to read it. I gave it away when I moved overseas. Some books need to be read 'in season' and I definitely read Mean Mother's in season this time.

I so enjoyed Peg sharing her experience being raised by a mean mother. And the short vignettes of other daughters experience were enlightening. The concept of the 'good enough mother', really resonates with me and I appreciated the encouragement and the warmth of the writing.

A few years ago, I walked into a Fred Meyers and caught sight of a mother and her daughter in the candle aisle. The mom had shoved back all the candles with her elbow and was leaning on the shelf, her head tilted, her face was soft with attention, her brow mildly furrowed. Every single ounce of this woman was expressing intention, attention, warmth, and attunement towards the young woman talking to her. My first response was, "jesus. are these those overly close mom-daughters that tell each other all their problems and share clothes and call each other 400 times a day?"

I made another lap around the aisle, pretending to look for a candle, just so I could get a closer look at this very intimate moment playing out in public. As I passed by, the mom reached out and touched the girls arm and said, "I don't know what to tell you, Julia, but know I am here for you and trust you can handle this." The young woman said, "Thanks mom."

And I made it to the dog food aisle before I lost my shit sobbing. Never. Not once, not for one god-forsaken moment in my entire life has my mom showed me the tenderness or attention that woman just showed her daughter in a damn grocery store. I was gutted.

One line in the book made me weep and also was such a sweet moment that I was not the only person who did this:

"I watched strangers- daughters and mothers in the supermarket aisles or taking a walk together - and was all the more bewildered. What made my mother and me so different?"

Mean Mother's was a supportive piece in my journey to figuring out this mom I have on this journey.

The only reason I did not give it 4 stars is that it is written almost exclusively for moms. There are a few toss-off sentences for grown women who chose not to have children, but pretty much 65% of this book is written to and for women who have activated the raising children gene. I am not one of those women, so I ended up skipping a lot, a lot, a lot of the: being the mom of a daughter is the best way to heal being the daughter of a mean mom.

Mary says

We live in a culture in which it's taboo to feel that your mother did not do a good job in raising you, or in fact, was downright toxic. I love, love, love this book because Peg Streep shamelessly tears down those unrealistic societal expectations of a "perfect" mother. Her research, based on real relationships between mothers and daughters over several generations, rings true. It is okay to recognize that your mother may have done some serious emotional, traumatic damage to you if she was not emotionally well equipped for motherhood herself. Likewise, you can learn from what you were lacking as a child -- and what you wish your mother had given you -- and try to provide that for your own daughter or son. And it is perfectly okay -- and healthy -- for you to do so without piling heaps of guilt on your shoulders for the times you don't juggle it all to perfection.

If you had a stable, loving childhood home, then happily, this book will not apply to your life specifically. In my case, there was sexual abuse on the part of my brother, which was not dealt with, as well as emotional neglect and abuse from both parents. To put it succinctly, it screwed me up, destroying any sense of self-esteem and any chance of trusting my own judgment -- and led to my miserable, abusive first marriage. Thankfully, I am in therapy and in recovery and have found the strength to put distance between myself and my parents. To some, that may sound bitter and spoiled, but if you grew up in an unstable, unhappy home environment, you get it. I have nothing to prove to those who don't understand. But Peg Streep, she GETS it.

I'm going to recommend this book to my therapist next time I meet with her. I borrowed this copy from the library but will likely go and purchase a copy for myself, to reference in the future when I need encouragement.

Readnponder says

I had to force myself to finish this book. It seemed a bit whiny to me. But then, I don't share the dilemma in which the author tragically found herself. I was reading it so I could better understand the mother/daughter dynamics of a close friend.

The author is careful to say she is addressing the situation of just plain MEAN mothers and not those who struggle with physical or mental illness. It's also clear that the limited number of choices for women and the expectations of society that all women should bear children created a larger number of mean mothers in previous generations. Hopefully now, women not inclined to motherhood will direct their energies

elsewhere.

Perhaps because I read this in bits and pieces over several weeks, I did not come up with a clear picture of what causes mean mothers and how their daughters can best recover. It was an endless stream of snippets from dozens of women's stories, intermingled with research. I would have tracked better had we been given 3 or 4 women's stories to follow throughout the book and the influence fathers or siblings or their own children had upon those individuals.

Bonnie Randall says

Any mother who has ever fallen head-over-heels in love with their child will find the idea of an unloving mother abhorrent—unbelievable, even. We have been socialized to believe that mother-love is a given; as natural and predictable as a sunrise. Streep, however, postulates that this is not always the case, and *Mean Mothers* explores the taboo notion that some mothers are both incapable and unwilling to love their children; these mothers don't just not love their daughters—they downright hate them, and this creates crippling emotional turmoil for the child who has never been the recipient of unconditional love.

As a clinical counselor I will recommend this book again and again as, in the addictions counseling field, I see with heartbreakingly repetition this story play out over and over again; daughters who were and are unloved by their mothers, and then self-medicate with substances in order to feel the warmth they've never received from the parental relationship.

This is difficult, uncomfortable subject matter; as said, it confronts a social taboo that stretches across cultures, geographies, and centuries. Mothers *always* love unconditionally—right?

Wrong. 4 Emotionally Provocative Stars

Alaine says

Got as far as page 40. This book seems like it would be relevant to my interests. I have a spectacularly terrible mother that I cut contact with years ago. This book made a point of saying that it's only talking about mean moms -- not moms who are mean because of mental illness. Why? Why does that matter? You have traumatized people as the result either way, and we're the ones reading. My mom very likely has at least one untreated mental illness. We'll never know because she has no ability to engage in self-reflection. She's not going to admit there's a problem that originates in her own brain. If she can't put the blame on someone else (ideally my dad), she's not copping to jack squat. There was that, and also the way the book feels like a high school essay with a minimum number of quotes from other works that must be included. I have less than a week before the fall semester begins. I don't have time for "meh" books!
