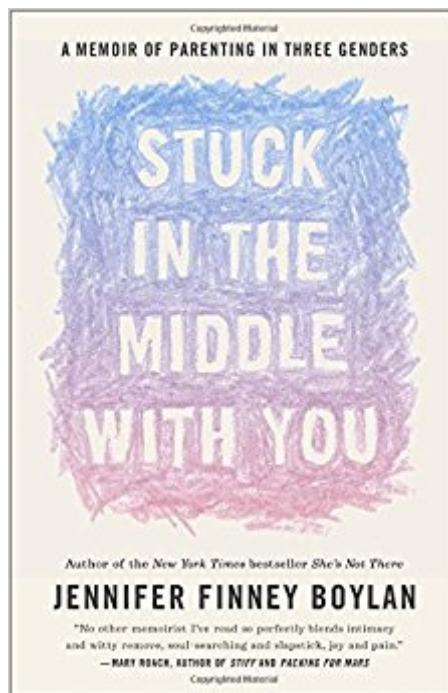




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# Stuck In The Middle With You: A Memoir Of Parenting In Three Genders



## Synopsis

New York Times bestselling author Jennifer Finney Boylan returns with a remarkable memoir about gender and parenting that discusses how families are shaped and the difficulties and wonders of being human. A father for six years, a mother for ten, and for a time in between, neither, or both, Jennifer Finney Boylan has seen parenthood from both sides of the gender divide. When her two children were young, Boylan came out as transgender, and as Jenny transitioned from a man to a woman and from a father to a mother, her family faced unique challenges and questions. In this thoughtful, tear-jerking, hilarious memoir, Jenny asks what it means to be a father, or a mother, and to what extent gender shades our experiences as parents. Through both her own story and incredibly insightful interviews with others, including Richard Russo, Edward Albee, Ann Beattie, Augusten Burroughs, Susan Minot, Trey Ellis, Timothy Kreider, and more, Jenny examines relationships between fathers, mothers, and children; people's memories of the children they were and the parents they became; and the many different ways a family can be. With an Afterword by Anna Quindlen, *Stuck in the Middle with You* is a brilliant meditation on raising and on being a child. Now with Extra Libris material, including a reader's guide and bonus content

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## Customer Reviews

*Stuck in the Middle with You: A Memoir of Parenting in Three Genders* Reader's Guide

Questions 1. On page 7, author Jennifer Finney Boylan compares her own marriage to Deirdre with that of Grenadine Phelps, whom she meets at a fencing match. “By almost

anyone's measure," she writes, "Deedie and I are the dangerous outliers, and Grenadine and her husband Mr. and Mrs. Normal. Do you think of Jennifer and Deirdre as 'outliers'? What makes a family 'normal'?" 2. Boylan writes, "It is my hope that having a father who became a woman has made my two remarkable boys, in turn, into better men. Do you believe this is true? How do you think having a parent who is 'atypical' affects children? Does it strengthen a family, or place it at risk?" 3. Throughout *Stuck in the Middle with You*, we observe Boylan worrying that her sons will suffer by not having a father, that it will be harder for them to learn what they need in order to become men. And yet, her sons appear to flourish and thrive, and she notes that she has taught them some "masculine" things, like splitting wood, regardless of her gender. How important is having both a mother and a father for raising well-rounded children? Is it possible that the sex of the parents is less important than the values they teach or model? 4. Deirdre Boylan says that "marrying Jenny was the luckiest thing that ever happened to me." Do you think this is true? If you were married to a spouse who emerged as transgender, would you be able to stay married to him or her? How important is gender to a relationship? Do you believe that we fall in love with a person, with a body, or both? 5. Boylan writes that "womanhood" "like manhood" "is a strangely flexible term." She even notes that there are "genetic" women who have a Y chromosome. Is there a single thing that you believe defines someone as a man or a woman? Is, as Boylan suggests, our gender identity more "strangely flexible" than we first suspect? 6. "One of the things about manhood I learned from my father," Boylan writes, "is that it's a solitary experience, a land of silences and understatement, a place where a lot of important things have to be learned alone. Whereas womanhood, a lot of the time, is a thing you get to share." Later, she suggests that fathers are more playful than mothers, and that mothers worry more about their sons and daughters. How do you think mothers and fathers are different in the way they interact with their children? 7. Richard Russo, in describing his largely absent father, says, "[I] can either take what he's offering . . . enjoy it and let the rest go, or . . . be bitter and resentful. For me [it was] just an easy choice. . . . Just to have fun with him." Are you surprised about Russo's remarkably forgiving approach to his father's many shortcomings? Have you ever been able, in your own life, to choose to "take what someone's offering" and "just have fun" instead of giving in to the very human instinct to feel resentment or anger? 8. Boylan's children, at a remarkably young age, seem to adjust to the change in their parent, and go so far as to come up with a new name for

her combination of Mommy and Daddy. Are you surprised by the way the boys so lovingly accept something that many adults might have struggled with? Do you think the boys might have struggled more if Boylan's transition occurred when they were older? 9. Edward Albee asks, in his interview with Boylan, whether parenthood "mean[s] making or is it the being?" He says, Boylan "never birthed [her two sons]. Isn't that a different quality of parenthood?" What do you think? Are parents who are not biologically related to their children different from parents who are? Does the experience of actually going through labor and giving birth change the relationship between parent and child? 10. Dr. Christine McGinn notes in her interview that the definition of motherhood and fatherhood are changing. She tells the story of being transgender, (from male to female), saving sperm, and later using that sperm so that she and her female partner could have children. Both mothers breast-feed, and both mothers are the biological parents of their children. Do you view this, as Boylan seems to, as primarily a story about love, and adaptability? What does it mean to be a mother or a father in the twenty-first century, when the definitions are changing so rapidly? Will all this change have a positive effect on children, making them, possibly, more accepting of the diversity of human experience? 11. Cartoonist Tim Kreider discusses his affection for the biological mother and half sisters he first meets in his forties. What do you think accounts for the connection that biological siblings can feel? Later, he suggests that while he's glad to have found his biological mother, he is unlikely to undergo a similar search for his biological father. Why would an adopted child be more curious about his or her biological mother than his or her father? 12. Boylan's mother, Hildegard, seems to accept Jennifer as her daughter, even after raising her as her son, in spite of the fact that she is a conservative person, both spiritually and politically. What do you think explains Boylan's mother's ability to put aside her confusion and simply believe that "love will prevail"? If your child came out to you as transgender, would you be able to accept him or her with the same love that we see from Hildegard? Is there anything that could happen that would make you turn your back on your child? Or should the love between parents and their children be a love without conditions? --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Boylan, a best-selling novelist for youth and adult readers and a nonfiction writer, picks up the thread of her *She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders* (2003) in this combination of memoir and interviews. Born male, Boylan became a woman after marrying and fathering two children. Here she recounts 6 years of life as a cross-dressing father and 10 years as a mother and chronicles the

demanding transition between those two roles. She writes of her yearning for normalcy and shares her mother's loving and affecting response to the announced change, "I would never desert my child. . . . There will be a scandal, for a while. . . . But - I will adjust. As striking as Boylan's transgender experiences are, she also offers reverberating counterpoint in universally relevant observations about parenting and time passing. By including candid and revealing conversations on gender and families with such writers as Richard Russo, Edward Albee, Susan Minot, and Anna Quindlen, Boylan illuminates diverse family relationships and the many ways families operate fluidly on a seemingly never-ending spectrum. This unique and giving book has tremendous resonance. --Whitney Scott --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

As the parent of a transgender adult, this was the first book I read after my daughter came out to our family. It is beautifully written, thoughtful, informative, funny, and comforting, and was a tremendous help at a time when I was trying to understand my daughter's struggles, as well as deal with my own. It made me feel that a world that had just been turned upside down for me would be righted in whatever the new "right" would be. I have given the book to friends so that they can better understand what it means to be born transgender. The entire experience has made me really think about something that I always knew: I love my children no matter who they are and how they express themselves. Especially, in this case, where my child has struggled so deeply and has anguished so much just wanting to be who she was born to be. Thank you Jennifer!

This book held my attention from beginning to end. It inspired me to go back and read Boylan's first memoir, which I also liked. In many ways, Boylan's transition was different than those of many trans\* memoirs, because she and her wife stayed married. The process of coming to terms with her identity necessarily involved her wife and sons, which added all kinds of complications and joys that single people transitioning don't have. The enormous empathy she shows for her family also makes this book special. Without minimizing her own struggles, she is clear-eyed about the cost of those struggles to people who really didn't sign up for that, but who stuck with her anyway. The first memoir focused on Boylan's own story, with the family issues coming in as needed to make that telling true. This book is the other way around, focused on the family issues, with details of her transition only present when necessary to explain something specific that happened. It's a brave book, beautifully written, and honest in ways that are not always comfortable to read. And to top it off, there is an afterword written by her wife, who shows herself to also be an articulate, charming,

and interesting writer.

I really enjoyed this book. I've read her other two (post-transition) and then her novel written as James Boylan. So I am definitely a big fan of this author. I did not see this book as simply a re-hash of "She's Not There" or "I'm Looking though You." I thought "Stuck in the Middle" offered some interesting insights that only time and perspective can offer. Also, the interviews are a great addition to the memoir style. Very insightful and just fun to read. I may be biased as I teach college-level gender and family communication, but definitely worth the read if you are interested in how transitions affect families or in how all families experience feeling different.

Reads like a long conversation with an old friend; at any rate, a friend who does most of the talking! Of all her three memoirs, this one is probably the most intellectually probing and detached, no small achievement considering it is also the most intimate and personal. It's also fiercely funny at points. This time around the story is not just the tale the journey of Jenny and her wife and children, although that is told again and TMI relief, but an exploration into the meaning and impacts of all of our parent-child relationships and the gender filters through which we view our lives. Thankfully, the issue of gender seems to take a back seat in this one and perhaps that is ultimately the point. Time, age, and perspective make this one the most profoundly mature of three excellent books in her memoir series. Jenny is now so comfortable in her own skin, and seems so happy in her own life, that now can come reflection and the quest for understanding.

I was thrilled when I received my copy of "Stuck in the middle with you". I'd read "She's Not There" previously and was taken in by the authors story and how she was able to alter her life's path, preserve her marriage and be a good parent to her two children."Stuck In The Middle" describes her becoming a parent and how doing so affects the very core of a person. Some parts of the narrative really struck home since I'd experienced many of the same things when I became a parent. One part that really stood out was her amazement that the hospital staff let them just walk out with their baby and felt like they'd pulled off a bank job. One of the things I loved most about the book were the conversations with people such as Edward Albee, Ralph James Savarese and Richard Russo about the nature of parenthood, what's a father, what's a mother and what parenting is and how it shapes our lives and the lives of our children. One theme that I saw was a common experience of parenting and that even when gender lines are blurred, a parent is someone who provides unquestioning love for their child regardless of the challenges. The chapter where Ralph James Savarese described

the challenges of raising an autistic child was very inspiring. I was deeply moved by the book and highly recommend it to all.

This is a sequel to "She's Not There", and to me not as good because it covers ground covered in the previous book. Still, Ms. Boylan is a great writer and can make anything sound fascinating. The main thing that sticks with me from this memoir...is how, after she became a woman, she kept being kicked out of bands she joined. As a man, even a middle aged man, as a rocker in a band, a talented musician, Jimmy got a lot of satisfaction and joy from playing in a band. As a middle aged woman...well, in our society, middle aged women are just not cool, especially in a rock band. Welcome to life over here, Jennifer. I wondered whether life as a woman was all Ms. Boylan dreamed it would be. I would ask her questions if I could. Still, her life is good in many ways...as a college English professor...as the parent of exemplary, talented, intelligent children...in a caring, devoted marriage that has weathered storms that would wreck most marriages. Ms. Boylan is so likable, so good natured, explains things so well, it was a pleasure to spend time in her company, in the form of reading another memoir, once again.

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