

Extracts from Marriage and Equality by Jennifer Johnson

Chapter 1: Christian social conservatives believe in equality but may not realize it

This is an image of the Holy Family that I used to keep in my office.

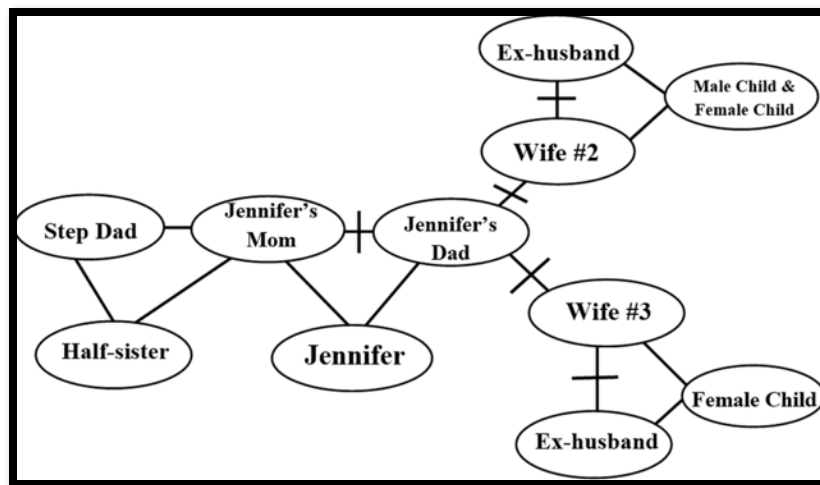


I would look at this image from time to time and pray to Jesus for wisdom for defending marriage and the family. One day I was looking at this image and saw a triangle between the head of Jesus, His mother Mary, her husband Joseph, then back to Jesus. I thought to myself, “Wow, that’s the family structure! It’s a triangle! It is not only a reflection of the Holy Family, it is a reflection of the Trinity!”

This excited me for a couple reasons. For one thing, I’ve discovered that the average person doesn’t understand what “family structure” or “structural issues” mean. Policy wonks, like me, tend to take for granted that others understand us when we use those phrases. To be able to show the family as a triangle means that the average person now has a simple way to understand what those phrases mean.

I was also excited because I wondered how it would apply to my own childhood. I had not been raised with my own married parents. My parents divorced when I was three and went on to subsequent marriages, divorces, different children, a lot of back and forth between “two homes,” and a lot of chaos.

I went home that night and applied the family triangle to my situation. I carefully drew it all out, using several pieces of paper. It took me several tries to get everybody to fit onto the page in a way that made sense and was proportional. As I worked on it, I could tell that it was going to be far more complex than I had ever imagined. This is what I saw:



That’s me, in the bottom center circle. What do you think? What is your gut response to this? The first few hours after I finished the drawing were surreal, and I was in a daze. Seriously, what is this? How was I supposed to navigate this as a child, alone?

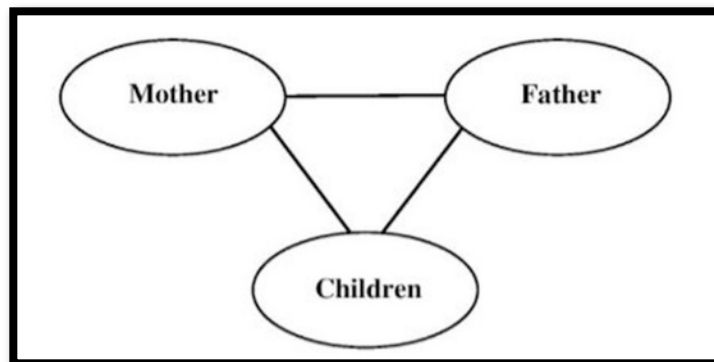
In fact, I didn’t navigate it at all. I blocked parts out as time went on, out of necessity. My kids will confirm that I never talked about my childhood while they were growing up. For one thing, I had no intellectual framework through which to understand it. All I knew was that it was chaotic and painful, and that I felt ashamed about it.

It was such a shock to see it all there in a two-dimensional way. I had a flood of emotions come over me, as it brought back memories of people that left my life due to divorce, so I was supposed to have forgotten them when that happened.

One of the first things that stuck out at me was how ugly it is. It looked like a malformed spider's web. It was not pretty like the simple triangle I had seen. My initial excitement turned to tears of sadness. And so I cried, a lot at first.

As time went on, I became angry at God for showing this to me. I couldn't understand why He would make me feel old pain like that. Why bring it all up again? Why have this ugly family structure burned into my mind now? Wasn't I better off just burying it all in the back of my mind, as if it never happened? The diagram reminded me of my shame. It was always very difficult to have so many different adults to reckon with constantly, and I didn't like having them thrust into my face again all at once. Is it safe for me to say that I just wanted my own family? MY family, MY triad, MY home?

Christian social conservatives believe in equality for children, because they believe in this for every child:



4: Confronting hypocrisy

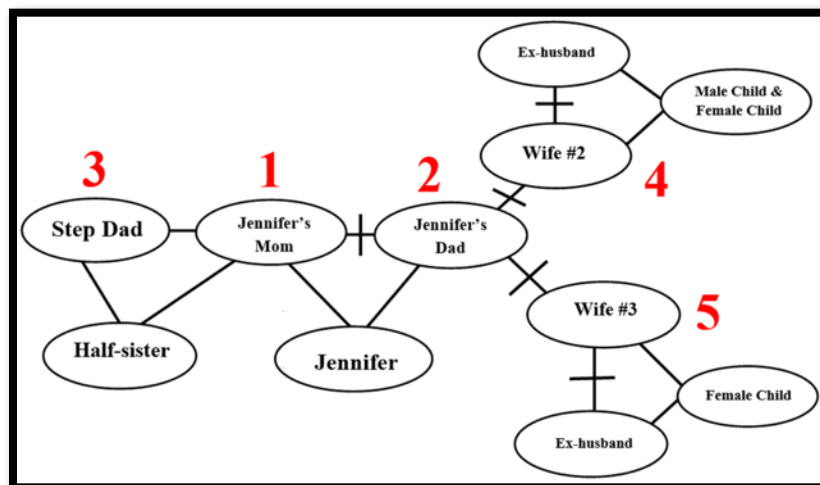
You wouldn't believe the profane things total strangers have said to me about my advocacy for natural marriage. Sometimes I ask them, "Were you raised by your own married parents?" and either they don't answer, or the answer is, "Yes." Given what the social science data says regarding outcomes, it is upsetting when these people take their intact families for granted. I'm sure you know people like this. They were raised by their own married parents, yet they are opposed to divorce reform, they advocate for same-sex marriage and

same-sex parenting, and they advocate for third-party reproduction (sperm/egg donation; surrogacy).

For example, there is a popular LGBT activist named Masha Gessen, who is also known for writing a biography of Vladimir Putin. In 2014, she was praised by John Kerry at a State Department function for LGBT foreign affairs. In 2012 she made a public statement about how she thinks marriage should be abolished so children can have a subjective number of legal parents. She is one of the few people who understands the connection between marriage and parentage, and she explicitly mentioned this link. Evidently, between the different ex-lovers and their children, there are three children between five adults. She wants all five of those parents' names to be listed on the kids' birth records.

Think about how a birth certificate is structured. There is a section for the father and the mother, and we can think of this like a mirror of the marriage certificate, with its section for the husband and the wife. This "mirror" analogy explains why birth certificates must be altered to accommodate same-sex marriage.

When I came across Gessen's remarks, something dawned on me. Thanks to the family structure diagram that I made in late 2013, I realized that I had five parents: a mom and two step-moms, a dad and one step-dad. Because of the divorces, and the need to ignore half of my family no matter where I was, I had not put it all together that way until I created the diagram. And even then, it wasn't until I encountered Gessen's remarks that I mentally numbered the parental figures from my childhood.



Then I did a little internet-sleuthing, and discovered that she was raised in the intact triad founded on natural marriage. So, she literally has NO IDEA what it is like to live as a child under what she's advocating. But I do. There is no way I want all those people to be my legal parents. That's crazy, full stop. But let's look at a practical consideration of her proposal. Instead of going back and forth between "two homes," I would have had three homes or even more. I say this because there is no legal or cultural pressure for adults to create a singular, stable and unified home for their children. Doing that to a child, so that the adults can have a revolving door of semi-permanent sex partners, makes my blood boil.