



The Bastard on the Couch

By Daniel Jones
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Introduction

It's not just women trying to make their way in today's contemporary world. Men, whose sole responsibilities were to be the breadwinners and the "hunters and gatherers," are finding themselves out-earned, out-hunted, and out-gathered by their post-feminist wives. In **The Bitch in the House**, twenty-six women describe the stresses in their lives, including their husbands who they feel aren't pulling their share of the weight in today's modern marriage. **The Bastard on the Couch** tells the other side of the story, revealing what today's men desire, need, love, and loathe in their relationships. Powerful, heartfelt, and irreverent, this collection of twenty-seven original essays is a bold, unprecedented glimpse into the dark corners and glaring truths of modern relationships that are guaranteed to amuse, entertain, enrich, and provoke a much needed dialogue between men and women.

Questions for Discussion

1. Many of the authors are "out-earned" by their wives, yet none of them feel overly threatened by this shift in power. Do you feel they represent the majority of men? Do you believe most men still prefer being the primary breadwinners in their families?
2. In both **The Bitch in the House** and **The Bastard on the Couch**, the men and women try to share the responsibilities of their households. In addition to splitting the workload 50/50 (or at least trying to), how else has the modern marriage evolved, according to these authors?
3. One of the main sources of contention for women is that their husbands are not as good at completing the household chores as they would like. In Christopher Russell's piece, he admits that his wife actually gives him a daily list of chores while she's at the office. Most of the men, however, are attempting to balance working from home and raising the family, in addition to taking care of the household chores. Is this an unfair role reversal? Would these same women appreciate being told what to do if they were the stay-at-home spouses?
4. In Anthony Swofford's piece, "On Loneliness, Comfort, and Being Savage," why do you feel he writes "loneliness, while necessary, is horribly expensive" (page 228)?
5. Robert Skates's "The Hole in the Window" paints a painful portrait of four men touched by divorce: the author, Francis, the landlord, Roger, the author's ex-wife's husband, and of course, the author's son. Skates writes that his father always tried to teach him that life wasn't fair. Why did Skates allow Roger and his son to have that rare father-son day together on the 4th of July? Did Skates feel it was fair to Roger and his son, even if it wasn't fair to him?
6. Kevin Cantry begins "The Dog in Me" by bragging about the condom he carries with him, the box of cigars in the glove compartment, and the expensive guitars he likes to play into the wee hours. At the end of the story, he reveals the condom has been unused for years, and really, his life is devoted to being a family man. Do you feel many men are like Cantry, needing to hold on to at least the illusion of "being a dog?"
7. Both Panio Gianopoulos ("Confessions of a Boy Toy") and Touré ("An Invitation to Carnal Russian Roulette") are men who like to score with women. By the end of his essay, Panio settles into a relationship with his girlfriend, and the reader truly believes it's for the long haul. Touré also settles down by the end of his piece, but will it last? Based on their confessions and their personalities, what is the difference between these two men?
8. Manny Howard's "Embracing the Little Steering Wheel" examines "masculinity" and marriage in our contemporary world. He writes, "But this marriage clearly was not under my control. I could try to maneuver it, but it wouldn't do any good, because my hands were white-knuckling a child-sized steering wheel made of yellow plastic." If the biggest problem confronting women today is having it all and not being able to necessarily handle it all, how does Manny Howard's piece represent the biggest problem facing today's modern married man?
9. In "Men in Houses," Ron Carlson examines his early need for freedom and how in his older age, it's the last thing he wants. The couch, which once represented an anchor that kept him from living his idealized nomadic life, soon became the anchor that kept his family closer to him. Do you feel men like Ron are surprised by their own eventual nesting?
10. In **The Bitch in the House**, women seem more driven by the need to succeed professionally. Cutting back hours hardly ever seems to be an option in order to spend more time with family and to just overall simplify their lives. In **The Bastard on the Couch**, the men actually seem to encapsulate more about what the feminist movement should be about. Do today's enlightened men place more value on family time than today's modern women?

About the Editor

Daniel Jones is the author of the novel **After Lucy**, which was a finalist for the Barnes and Noble Discover Award. He is a contributing

editor at The *New York Times* where he edits the weekly "Modern Love" column in Sunday Styles. He lives in Massachusetts with his wife, Cathi Hanauer, and their two children.