
Daniel Jones

The Bastard on the Couch
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Whose idea was it to write this book? Did you feel you needed to rally the troops to respond to *The Bitch in the House*, or did your wife, Cathi Hanauer, talk you into it? Or a little of both?

A little of both. Cathi occasionally thought about a man's response, and when her book did so well it made a man's response commercially possible. But at that point we both realized she wasn't the person to do it ... I was. But the project scared me. I wasn't sure men would want to reveal anything about their marriages and relationships. And I'm a much more private person than Cathi, so wading into the great divide between men and women ... and "leading the charge," so to speak ... scared me even more. But I'm glad she nudged me, because it's the best project I've ever taken on: the most exciting, fulfilling, educational, and successful. It wasn't easy, but I've loved it, and I think it needed to be done. I can't tell you how many people have told me how much they appreciated having a male counterpart to **The Bitch in the House** to balance things.

In your contribution, "Chivalry on Ice," you point out the "creeping loss of kindness and generosity in our oh-so-modern marriage." Do you feel that in our effort for equality, the battle lines in most marriages have been so clearly defined that there's no longer any wiggle room, no willingness to compromise? And doesn't there need to be a bit of compromise, from both partners, for any relationship to last?

I feel like "equality" — which often means greater parity of income, responsibilities, etc., between men and women, husbands and wives — has left us with a lot of unexpected challenges along with the victories. Many men and women are running from stereotypes but don't know what they're running towards. Independence? Self-sufficiency? Yet part of marriage is taking care of each other, along with the children. But sometimes the caretaking feels awkward or antiquated in couples where both husband and wife are armed with an Amex gold, buffed from the gym, and educated with equivalent degrees. In discussing the books, someone wrote that in the modern family there is a big hole where the "wife" used to be. And this is true. Working women need a traditional wife to take care of house and home just as men do. But these days, in dual-income couples, that role is often left unfilled. Domestic help can fill some gaps, but not all. And for this problem, I truly see no solution.

What is it like to be married to a fellow writer? Is it even harder for you to separate work and family? Is there ever any competition, or is it the perfect arrangement, since you always have someone around to bounce your ideas off of? (In all fairness, we asked your wife the same question.)

It's impossible for us to separate work and family. We used to both have offices in the house, for eight or ten months, and at least we saw the wisdom of me getting an office outside of the house, so we have that separation during the day. But the upside, yes, is that we help each other with our work enormously. Neither of us is afraid to tell the other the truth editorially, and we trust each other's instincts. That doesn't mean our exchanges about our work are always nice and happy. And our children get very sick of hearing us talk about our work.

***The Bitch in the House* stirred a national conversation and generated a tremendous amount of feedback, both negative and positive. It accomplished a major goal of Cathi's: to get people talking, and talk they did, and continue to do. What has been the most surprising feedback about *The Bastard on the Couch*?**

I've been surprised by women who have embraced the book (and the men's parenting philosophies discussed therein) as a backlash against the current mommy madness of over-scheduling our kids and over-parenting them. Sandra Tsing Loh wrote about this in her essay discussing the books in the *Atlantic* [Monthly]. And Ann Hulbert took a similar tack in *Slate*. I wasn't expecting such an embrace from the sophisticated female reader. I thought they'd be curious, but I was very surprised to find readers like Ann and Sandra among the book's champions.

How difficult was it to convince your contributors to be Bastards in your compilation?

Some I had to prod to get into the messier truths of their lives, and with others I had to pull back on the reins. I do think many of the men had a tougher assignment than many of the women in **The Bitch in the House**. For whatever reason, women seem to have no qualms about complaining about their husbands or spilling the details of married life. For men this seems to be more of a taboo, like it's more frowned upon for a man to air similar grievances. Add to that many of the men in these essays are admitting to being in positions of relative weakness compared to the women in their lives; these are hard subjects for men to broach: being pushed away by their wives sexually, earning less than their wives, etc. It's a whole new world for men and women, and while women are talking about the impact of this, men aren't. It's a conversation we men need to have, but will we? Is it what men will ever do? Should we? We'll see.