

THE BASTARD ON THE COUCH



27 Men Try Really Hard to Explain Their Feelings
About Love, Loss, Fatherhood, and Freedom

David Gates • Vince Passaro • Ron Carlson
Kevin Canty • Anthony Swofford • Fred Leebron
Lewis Nordan • Elwood Reid • Touré • Thomas Lynch
Anthony Giardina • and Sixteen Other Original Pieces

EDITED BY DANIEL JONES

With a Foreword by Cathi Hanauer, Editor of THE BITCH IN THE HOUSE

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Daniel Jones (Editor)

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The husband of *The Bitch in the House* responds with a collection of original essays in which male writers describe what men desire, need, love, and loathe in their relationships and in the world today.

Cathi Hanauer's bestselling *The Bitch in the House: 26 Women Tell the Truth about Sex, Solitude, Work, Motherhood, and Marriage* spurred a national conversation about the level of friction in contemporary marriages and relationships. Now her husband, Daniel Jones, has rallied the men for the "literary equivalent of The Full Monty," in which twenty-seven thoughtful, passionate and often hilarious men, lay it bare when it comes to their wives and girlfriends, their hopes, and fears.

Enough with pop psychiatrists telling us why men lie, cheat, and want nothing more than to laze around the house in front of the TV. Enough with women wondering aloud—at increasing volume—why the men in their lives behave the way they do. The time has come for men to speak for themselves.

Many of the husbands and fathers in these pages contemplate aspects of their personal lives they've never before revealed in print—they kick open the door on their marriages and sex lives, their fathering and domestic conflicts, their most intimate relationships and situations. Yet unlike the average meat-and-potatoes father who still rules the roost, these men are grappling with new ideas of manhood — some they are going after and grabbing, and others that are being thrust upon them by a changing world.

Powerful, heartfelt and irreverent, *The Bastard on the Couch* is a bold, unprecedented glimpse into the dark corners and glaring truths of modern relationships that is guaranteed to amuse, entertain, enrich, and provoke.

The Bastard on the Couch: 27 Men Try Really Hard to Explain Their Feelings About Love, Loss, Fatherhood, and Freedom Details

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Xochitl says

worked hard to enjoy it... few essays made sense to me, "My life as a Housewife", "Chivalry on Ice" .. some others were interesting although foreign to my reality "Confessions of a Boy Toy" "my Marriage, My affairs-His Story", "The Hole in the Window", "She didn't want a S.N.A.G; she wanted me". Definitely disagree with the wife's role in "My list of Chores" or "Father of the year" not all of us women are like that. I want to understand how is it scheduling and alternating a "week of hell" for the couple in "Ward and June R Us" works for them, at home, if my husband is sitting at his computer and i'm struggling to run house and family by myself it becomes a real HELL. At the end, trying to make sense of this book, it'd be great if I could grab little pieces of each one of the men, the ones I liked, and put them together in one person... I know, impossible, but can't help to think about it. One thing that makes me uncomfortable after "reading" this book, it seems the more accomplished (professionally speaking, renowned) the person who wrote an essay is, the less clearer for me his essay was... not a good feeling indeed....

Andrew says

I came across this book in the library and thought it was an interesting premise. Unfortunately, after just four of the essays, I picked up on a common theme presenting itself: "I'm a dude and I'm so confused about what/how/who I'm supposed to be in this cray-cray woman-are-equal world." This ruined the entire effort for me.

I wonder when we men are going to move past the woe is me paradigm. Get over it already - treat other people with the same level of respect that you yourself would appreciate as a human being and I'm sure we'll all be a much happier world. I'm so tired of having the same conversation with other men who interpret the premise "women are and as such should be treated as equal to men" as somehow being a judgment that women are better than men. That's your own insecurities bubbling to the surface, no more, no less. Deal with that business on your own time and save the rest of us the drama.

Fantastic premise, lousy execution.

Carrie Muntean says

Some of these essays made me really angry, some were not that well written or didn't grip me, but some gave me a lot to think about and hopefully discuss with my husband. It was interesting to read about relationships from the male perspective, especially when so many had obviously given the issues a lot of thought. But like any collection of essays, you take the good with the bad.

Amy says

I was surprised at how much I liked this book. The men who tell their stories on the title's mentioned topics are very honest. I mean, VERY honest. moreso than I probably wanted them to. however, it also gave me great perspective on men, all the way from cheating, lying, fatherhood, working, and being in a committed relationship.

M says

Only interested in about half of the essays, and disappointed by most. Most of the men just seemed sort of bewildered at where they found themselves and confused by their harpy wives. I tended to feel more for them than their wives, but did not relate to the shrugging-it-off endings and disinclination to dealing with the issues head-on.

Landismom says

Not as good as "The Bitch in the House," in my opinion.

Elyse Walters says

Both these books ---

"The Woman's book (which came out first) --which both have sleazy titles --(as in they sound like they might be written my any 'knucklehead' off the street --
but ALL of these short stories are each written by successful talented 'authors'....

which is what 'adds' an extra special punch to these books.

I had given my copies away to a friend several years ago ---(and am now buying the books again). I miss having them --sharing them with my friends!

These are fun stories to read on a lunch break --in the bathroom -- when not in the mood for a novel --yet you want something 'meaty-& fun' to read!

Inspiring writers contributed to these two books!

Shelby says

This is really, really interesting reading. This is like.. the antithesis of the Lifetime Network. It's what the "bitches in the houses" and Lifetime Network execs don't want you to read--stories about love and marriage

written from a male perspective. There are some very depressing stories written by some guys that you can immediately tell just don't have it together, and there're also some very heartfelt, sweet stories written by men who seem to be very happy with their relationships and positions in society. Most of the authors are freelance writers with "breadwinner" wives/girlfriends, so it's interesting to hear their Mr. Mom/housewife-ish stories.

This isn't the brow-beating, woman-bashing, brimming-with-bravado expose that you think it could quickly turn out to be. It's not light couch reading, either. It's nice to read this after reading a sex-heavy book like "Self-Made Man." It shows that men have a lot of heart.. or, at least, freelance writer men from New York/the dense jungles of suburbia have a lot of heart. The irony of it all is that these men are finding themselves in the same position that women were in fifty years ago. Maybe this book is their attempt to sort out these new-found feelings. It's forcing me to consider new and different perspectives.

Emily says

This essay collection is the companion to Cathi Hanauer's *The Bitch in the House*. The editor, Daniel Jones, is Hanauer's husband. He has endeavored to bring a male perspective to the topics presented in Hanauer's book, such as household equality, gender roles in parenting, the "feminist backlash", adultery, and men's perceived ineptitude. The essays were quite enlightening and had very valuable information to convey about how these men are dealing with these issues in their own lives. However, they are almost all sensitive, upper-class, white, intelligent, writer-types. Of course, when looking for authors to contribute written works, you're going to get a load of writer-types, but it would have been nice to have had more diverse submissions. As far as I could tell, only one writer was African-American, and one Greek. There are no submissions from "working class" men, unless you count struggling writers who also do construction or barista work. Sure, men think about Important Things and approve of Female Equality, but you're going to find a lot more Sensitive New Age men in New York and San Francisco than, say, rural Nebraska or Alabama. I want to know what *those* men think of all this, particularly since Hanauer seems to have been able to find a more representative class of women for her collection (although they were just as white, they were a little more geographically and socio-economically diverse).

I have to say that I really enjoyed these submissions, particularly the one from a man who hires on as a nanny and eventually becomes the stay-at-home dad to a woman's four children. Also, it was nice that Jones was able to track down the male half of a couple of Hanauer's essayists. "Hank Pine" and "Hannah Pine" both write about their open marriage in a way that is sympathetic and extremely interesting.

If you sometimes feel like The Bitch in the House, and are resentful of The Bastard on the Couch (or the other way around), I would invite you to check out both of these books.

Ashley says

A compilation of 27 essays by guys on love and life. Highly underwhelming; common theme of how women now have the same jobs that used to be held only by men, a fair amount of women make more than their spouse/significant other, and *gasp* can even have children by themselves. What DO we need men for anyways? Apparently so they can whine and complain about their current underappreciated status and extoll the virtues of eheating, I mean, enjoying varied experiences that are commonly looked down upon by women (they're jealous, I tell ya! Just jealous!) while in the confines of monogamy.

Insert eye roll here. Puh-leese - quit your moaning and complaining and man up, already. (Pun intended.)

The Tick says

All of these essays were readable, but I felt like most of them didn't really capture the spirit of its companion book. An annoyingly large number of the essays also fell back on "Men are like X, women are like Y" stereotypes and clichés. Seriously, being good at parenting and housework is not encoded into every woman's DNA or anything.

Kristina says

If you would like to read a book about a bunch of men bitching about "modern" women and "modern" marriage, have I got the book for you: *The Bastard on the Couch: 27 Men Try Really Hard to Explain Their Feelings About Love, Loss, Fatherhood, and Freedom*. Not all the essays are masterpieces of passive-aggressive hostility, but many of them are. There's at least one essay that screams "Woman issues! Woman issues!" because it is particularly bitter and nasty. However, most of these essays are written by men who seem bemused as to the roles they are playing in their relationships and can't quite figure out how they got there.

This book came about as a response to *The Bitch in The House: 26 Women Tell the Truth About Sex, Solitude, Work, Motherhood, and Marriage*. I have read this book (even though this is not noted on my GR shelves; obviously, pre-GR) and found it to be fascinating, enlightening and mirroring some of my own experiences. That book was edited by Cathi Hanauer. *Bastard on the Couch* is edited by her husband, Daniel Jones. He wanted a man's point of view (because, you know, we *never* get enough of the white man's perspective) so he put together this collection. This is what Jones has to say about his book:

I should say up front that this collection does not pretend to reflect the state of *all* men. It is not a mirror image of contemporary family life, where the average meat-and-potatoes working father may still rule the roost. In this book, the majority of men are dealing with *new* ideas of manhood—some of which they are going after and grabbing, others of which are being thrust upon them by a changing world. They are struggling to define themselves as the first generation of husbands and boyfriends and fathers who are, in many cases, less powerful than their wives or girlfriends in earning, influence, education, and ambition. And unlike women, we men are just beginning to face our confusion at the surprising roles we're playing both in our marriages and out of them (xxvi).

That paragraph highlights the weaknesses of this collection of essays: lack of variety in the male perspective. This collection of essays features (with one exception) all white men. Not just that, but all the men are of the same socio-economic class (or seem to be). With few exceptions, they live in Manhattan or Brooklyn (the trendy areas, you know, not where the normal people live) or some other equally cosmopolitan area—or they did at one point. All the men are professional writers and editors with two exceptions: one is a ceramicist (ceramic artist) and the other is described as basically a housewife: "...in addition to running the household, he writes, coaches, and occasionally teaches" (280, contributors). These men, apparently, are the ones dealing with the "new" ideas of manhood; that is, they find themselves in the *horrible* position of having wives or girlfriends who make more money than they do so they can stay home to write bitchy essays. What I find so incredibly elitist about Jones's statement is his view that the "average meat-and-potatoes" men

don't also grapple with these problems. I mean, they're so meat-and-potatoes! Men who work in construction, or in law enforcement, or hell, pick up garbage for a living would have *no idea* of what it's like to have a wife who maybe earns more, or—gasp!—maybe works *at all!* thus necessitating typical marriage chores be shared. The problems these "first generation" men are dealing with are reserved solely for wealthy, highly-educated, writer boys who whine a lot. I mean, a whole fucking lot. And that's the biggest problem with this book—these writer boys have all the time in the world to not only whine about how confused they are about their masculinity, they also have time to put their whining into written form and get paid for it. Jesus, boys. Get over yourselves.

My irritation aside, I do understand on some level what these guys are saying. For centuries, men have killed animals, brought them home, grilled them and women fed the kids and cleaned the cave. Awesome. So now that (oh no!) women can go out and kill the animals themselves, men are standing around with their dicks in their hands wondering what the hell to do. So, are men confused? Yeah, I guess some of them are. Some men, however, have the sense to just get on with it. Just because a woman can also be highly educated and make a lot of money in some corporate job that I'd rather cut my throat than work at, doesn't mean a man is any less of a man. An intelligent, independent woman is not threatening your manhood. Men who *are* threatened by this have issues...and they're probably the ones who don't want women to have control of their reproductive organs, their sex lives or get equal pay for equal work. These men are the true cave men and it seems that some of them are writing essays and getting them published in dumb ass books like this one.

A few themes popped up over and over again in the essays. One was sexual freedom, or "open marriage" as Hank Pine calls it in "My Marriage, My Affairs—*His Story*." Hank is quite thrilled with his open marriage. He has a wife he professes to love, she says she loves him, and he gets to bone any hot young thing that'll have him. He says it keeps his marriage fresh. Uh huh. His wife also has a man—just one—that she keeps as her steady fuck buddy. What's so amusing about this is Hank is really bothered by how *happy* his wife is after coming home from being with this guy (she has a "bewildered grin" on her face because she's clearly "just had her brains fucked out" 59) and that bothers him. Oh, but he's enlightened about his jealousy. It's natural, he says. Now, I don't think that's a good basis for a strong marriage, but different strokes for different folks, ya know? But whenever Hank yammers on about how being with his afternoon delight makes him feel closer to his wife, I get the message that he's really pissed off that his wife enjoys their arrangement—enjoys it way too much—and he is resentful of this. She should be jealous, not him! She's having too much fun! So, okay, Hank, if this arrangement is the glue that keeps your marriage happy and healthy then why are you so defensive? (And angry?)

Probably the biggest themes in the book (and this makes sense since all these men are so confused) are feminism and independence and equal division of household and child care chores. A lot of the essays are about men who are married to high-achieving women who leave the men home to do the housework, take care of the kids, etc. The men say they are okay with this (remember, these are the "new" men) but I'm not so sure they are. Some of them have cause to complain. Christopher Russell, in his essay, "My List of Chores," is given a list every day by his wife, Gia. She goes over every item as if he's an imbecile. Every day he says to his wife that he'll do his best to get everything on the list done then ignores the list. I think his wife is nuts. If she handed me a list like that I'd say, "Fuck you, Gia." I'd complain too if I were being treated like a paid servant. As whiny as I find the men, the women are just as annoying and awful as their male counterparts. They all kind of suck and I find their preoccupation of how to handle even the simplest chores to be absolutely fucking ridiculous. Just do it. The men are overly sensitive about making sure that women aren't always doing "women's jobs" because of feminism. Feminism also apparently prevents men from being kind and courteous. It's amazing what feminism gets blamed for in these essays. "Oooh, she can't mop the floor. Feminism." Or: "I can't open the door for my wife anymore. Feminism." What the fuck.

I don't know what feminism means to these numbnuts, but to me it just means that women want to be recognized as intelligent human beings capable of making their own decisions about their bodies and their lives. Kind of like, you know, *men*. That's all. It doesn't mean we can't be courteous to each other. It doesn't mean a woman can't mop the floor. It means she is capable of accomplishing *more* than just mopping the floor.

Daniel Jones, the editor, is seriously confused about feminism. In his essay "Chivalry on Ice" he says he likes having an independent wife, but boy, it does mess up his idea of chivalry. He can't be a knight in shining armor anymore. Or he's confused about when to be a knight. He relates this story: many years ago, before they were married, his wife Cathi called him in the middle of the night. She wanted him to come over and kill a bug on her bedroom wall. He, appropriately enough, declined and told her if the bug bothered her so much, she should come over to his place and sleep. She's pissed off that he won't do this. Here's the confusion: she says, "I never ask you to do anything for me but when I do, you refuse!" Dan says: "I was in bed and I don't like bugs either so why should I kill it?" I think Dan's an idiot (based on the rest of his essay), but I side with him on this: Cathi's request is unreasonable. Just kill the damn bug yourself or sleep in the living room. Of course, he then follows up this story with this paragraph of sexism:

I know, I know. I can already hear the jeers and boos from the studio audience, the finger-pointing demands that Cathi leave me rather than put up with such shabby treatment, and the gleeful shouts of "You go girl!" when the love of my life—sufficiently rallied by the mob—suggests that maybe she will (76).

Oh, fuck you, Dan. His essay doesn't improve from there. Because his wife is a weirdo and thinks Dan is not chivalrous because he doesn't offer her tea when he's getting a cup or doesn't express sufficient sympathy when she has a cold, Dan is now obsessed with how to be the knight in shining armor. When is it appropriate? When is it not? What are the rules? Do you open doors for women now? (I wrote on the book's page: "How bout you just be polite and hold the door for whatever gender is behind you?") He has a long list of actions that are not okay (don't open a woman's door) but are okay (yes, you have to pay for her meal). May I politely suggest that the problem isn't feminism or when to don your knight's armor or women in general? It's you, Dan, and the women you date. Collectively, you're all nuts. Here's what Dan thinks of Cathi, his now-wife: "Here was a woman, I thought, who didn't need me, who didn't even want to live with me, who had no expectations or desire to be supported or catered to by a man. She was, in my mind, a feminist in the best sense—not a man hater or a bra burner but someone who wanted equality across the board, equal power and opportunities and treatment expectations (80)." Let's just ignore that he defines a feminist as *not* being a man hater and a bra burner (which didn't really happen anyway)...I mean, whew. But is that what he wants? A woman who doesn't need him or have any expectations of him? Without getting into a long philosophical discussion of love and relationships, I would say that "need" and "expectations" are in there somewhere, no matter what kind of "modern" marriage you have. Essentially, Dan's argument is look, women, you either need men to be knights or you don't. You can't have your cake and eat it too. So if you say you're independent and we hold you to that, you can't get pissed off if we don't kill bugs for you. So men aren't knights anymore, and that's women's fault. Rather, *feminists'* fault. And tied in with the idea of a knight's protection is chivalry. Not only can men not protect, help or assist women, they can no longer be chivalrous. Because—in Dan's pea-sized brain—chivalry is equated to manliness and not to common courtesy and kindness. So instead of doing whatever knights should do, feminists now require men to shove their inner knights into freezers. "All across the land there are men whose chivalrous tendencies have been put on ice—a whole subspecies of husbands and boyfriends who have been set loose from tradition to wander the dark forests of their relationships in search of new ways of being necessary and useful" (83). So what do these knight-hating (if not men-hating) feminists want men to do now? We degrade them by sending them on "missions not of gallantry but of drudgery" to the grocery store to buy cantaloupes and tampons. (Let's think about that.)

Holy crap. Feminists aren't men-haters, but we're totally knight-killers. Or fans of freezers. Or something. I feel as if I should apologize to my husband for every time I've sent him to the store. It doesn't matter that he was usually going to the store anyway on a beer-and-chocolate run or that when he came home from the store I was going to assemble a meal from the items he'd bought—no, none of that matters. I'm a killer of his inner knight because I asked him to do a routine chore. Gasp. The horror. *The horror.*

So, Dan's a complete jackass. Who's next?

Rob Spillman in "Ward and June R Us" tells the tale of how he and his wife both work from home and how they were both irritated with the household and childcare chores. So they devise a clever plan: they switch roles. Some weeks he'll be the "man" (Ward) and work all day and ignore the kids, the dirty dishes, and the empty carton of orange juice because his wife is handling these typical "female" (June) chores. Then, they switch and his wife is the "man." It's the worst of both worlds. Instead of cooperating to handle these chores, they fall back on stereotypical and sexist roles. How about you take the kids to daycare when they aren't in school and wash the dishes later? Why should one person be miserable for a week when s/he's the "woman" (June)? But they abandoned their "broken, resentment-laced egalitarian marriage" because the "liberation that feminism had promised" hadn't happened (180). Damn that feminism. Once again, it's messing up someone's happy marriage. So, Rob says, their Ward/June 1950s marriage arrangement works great. Except on weekends (those are "murky swamps"). And the business trip or unplanned-for deadlines. And sometimes Ward can't seem to make a better dinner than pizza or chicken nuggets and June thinks wiping off the bathroom faucet with a tissue is cleaning...and sometimes June gets *really* resentful when Ward is enjoying the latest issue of *Artforum* while the kids are freaking out and dinner is burning in the oven...but, you know, except for those *few* things, their 1950s, no-feminists-need-apply arrangement is working just great. What I see is an arrangement that allows them to take turns being sexist, "that's not my job" assholes. However, they're delightful compared with what I found to be the most offensive essay: "This Dog's Life" by Thomas Lynch.

This essay is the only essay I can come right out and say, yeah, this guy has some woman issues. He still has considerable anger for his former wife for leaving him and their children. He's angry with the judge for denying him child support. If he had written this essay within a few months or a few years of all this happening, I could almost sympathize. Almost. But there was at least a seven-year gap between the wife leaving and the time he wrote this essay (possibly longer) and this essay drips with bitterness and malevolence towards women. First, Lynch starts by discussing the death of his sister's Labrador, Baxter. Baxter is a female. He doesn't even need to state that he detests the dog—you fully understand that by reading the essay. Because the dog snarls at people, he suggests it be put down. His sister is appalled by this, but what does she do? She puts the dog on a shitload of drugs to keep it "calm." What the fuck. So the dog lived most of its sad life in a drugged-up coma. Now I think the whole damn family should be thrown in prison—what an awful way to treat a dog. The essay somehow works its way from the dog to how much he hates women. Probably not too much of a stretch for this guy because his thesis is: we're all bitches. Pages 262-263 are filled with rants about women's "litany of injustices": glass ceilings, hostile work environments, unequal pay, "the who-does-the-most-work-in-the-house debate." However, stacked against that, are things he considers to be unfair to men:

That *Roe v. Wade* gave legal reproductive options to women but not to men (there was no clinic to which men could repair to terminate, with Supreme Court approval, their impending paternity) was a bother. If "choice" were such a fine thing, it occurred to me, oughtn't one and all, not one half, of the population have it? That my daughter might "choose" a career in the military but only my sons had to register for the draft struck me as odd. No less the victim-chic status of the feminist intelligentsia who were always ranting about "women and other

minorities” whilst quietly ignoring the fact that women had been the majority for years. That women not only outnumbered men, they outlived them—by years, not months, in every culture—seemed a thing that ought to be addressed. Never mind the incessant sloganeering, or the women who blamed Ted Hughes for Sylvia Plath’s suicide or who blamed their husbands for the history of the world or who turned men into the tackling dummies for their chronic discontent (262).

He continues for another page and a half and the rant only gets crazier. Lynch tries to explain away his ranting by saying that, well, that was *then*, this is *now* and we’re an evolving species and that our problems aren’t just men’s problems or women’s problems—they’re humanity’s problems. Oh, and he really loves his (current) wife and he has *a lot* of women friends, so it’s all good. I’m not convinced. Thomas Lynch, you have some serious issues with women. See a therapist.

Most of the essays in this book leave something to be desired. I didn’t get much insight into the male brain—only (as editor Dan Jones promised in his introduction) the limited perspectives of these “first generation” men dealing with the realities of the modern world. Some variety would have been pleasant. I summarized Dan’s “inner knight” essay for my husband (who Dan would probably consider a “meat-and-potatoes” man) and asked him if I was forcing his inner knight into the freezer. He just shrugged and said, “Nah.” For him, it was a stupid thing to worry about. I’m fascinated by the hang-ups of these people regarding household chores. If something needs done, just get it done. My husband doesn’t call himself a feminist, but he doesn’t give two shits about who cleans the house as long as it eventually gets done. We both wash dishes and sweep the floor. We both take out the garbage. We both cook. We never had a dumb ass discussion about the division of labor; we mostly divide work along the lines of who can do it better (or in some cases who is being less lazy). The people in this book really over think this stuff—it’s a problem only when the man (or the woman) isn’t flexible about jumping in and helping no matter what the task is. These essays written by supposedly enlightened, “new age” men aren’t all that enlightened. Many of them have the luxury of working from home with flexible schedules, so if their busy, high-achieving wives ask them to do more household chores or run errands, they shouldn’t grumble about their damn inner knights being locked in freezers. They should strap on their damn armor, rusty as it may be, and go out and slay a few steaks. Buying tampons doesn’t damage masculinity, it only enhances it.

Melissa says

Great companion to The Bitch in the House. I enjoyed Bastard more than Bitch, probably because I’m already pretty familiar with the she-said side of things. Read both, and hug your partner.

Mike says

When I read the cover and inside flap I expected this book to be a slightly humorous look at the dynamic relationship marriage has become. Instead I was disappointed by a series of stories about how marriage just isn’t what it used to be and how the “traditional” marriage is off base in today’s world. As a married man I felt no relation to the authors and in fact felt that a lot of it was just bitching about why their lives aren’t the way they hoped. I gave the book two stars because I at least finished it.

Tori Miller says

I was looking forward to reading this book because I really like Bitch in the House and I was looking forward to hearing the male perspective. I found this book depressing. Also, I think because the essays are all written by writers I am not sure if it relates much to the typical male - like you are just getting the perspective of men who are all writers rather than a bigger cross section of men.
