

## Family Matters, Except When It Doesn't

Contributed by Matt Katz  
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I've picked a fight with my own team. Men, it turns out, hate me.

I recently wrote a largely satirical column about how sperm banks, cloning and the increasing financial independence of property-owning women are making men (and fathers) virtually obsolete.

Men, apparently, are NOT going silently. With the exception of a few touching e-mails from women about how they depend on their husbands, I was bombarded with angry e-mails from dudes around the world (or at least America and Australia).

One began: "Dear Mr. Katz (or should I say Ms. Katz)."

I liked that one.

Others acted like evil armchair psychologists, analyzing why I'd commit such "male bashing." One suggested my problem was I wasn't slapped "upside the head" enough by my father when I was young. Another used twisted logic to argue that I hate myself, and therefore because I'm a man I hate all men.

I didn't understand the importance of men and fathers in raising a family, readers said, and this was because my father didn't love me enough.

A blogger posted this about my allegedly anti-man views: "It is anger towards something. Maybe his father was never there for the family? And I don't mean he was just off working, I mean actual neglect."

Sooooo, since you asked for it, this, in a nutshell, is my story. Analyze all you want -- I certainly have.

The guy I call Dad began as my mother's boyfriend. Then they married (with my permission, by the way -- I was 3) and he became my stepfather. Later I changed my name to his last name, making him my stepfather-with-the-same-name, which was confusing to my friends in fourth grade. And finally he adopted me, which might be the best thing that ever happened to me. And yes, he certainly loves me enough.

But it gets more confusing. He has two daughters from a previous marriage, who were my stepsisters but are now my real, non-biological sisters. They each have a half-brother and another stepbrother.

When I was growing up -- and my birth father himself has even suggested this -- it was better for me that it was just me and my Mom (and later me and my Mom and Dad) rather than the traditional nuclear family with him in the house.

With the exception of a gaping eight-year hole smack in the middle of my childhood, I have spoken to my biological father about once a month. The last time I called him by name I used the term "Daddy," but that was 22 years ago and at this point the term has worn off. So I don't call him anything anymore, which is occasionally awkward.

But none of this is at all dysfunctional, and it's not even really that traumatic. In fact, I'm lucky I got my Dad.

I just got a Christmas card from a friend who has two adorable sons of two different nationalities -- they adopted their first child thinking they couldn't have a baby, and then they had a second child the old-fashioned way. Another friend, a father of a 10-year-old girl from a previous marriage, is raising his girlfriend's son as his own -- she was single during her entire pregnancy, and they began dating right after she gave birth.

Mothers and fathers no longer fit into the easy categories that my hate mail suggests. And yet love still exists beyond the old school mom-and-dad-have-two-kids situation.

My pro-men pen pals are right that upbringing and family life can be

the most important factor to a child's well-being. And I think they're right that in an ideal world, a child is best in a family with two parents. Logistically and financially, this makes the most sense. If one of the parents is a dud, you've got the other.

But a lot of times, living with two parents who despise each other is really the biggest problem of them all. And if one parent leaves it doesn't automatically mean the kid is going to get a step-this and a half-that and therefore end up in county prison doing 6 1/2 for possession.