

# Cultural Daily

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## How to (and How Not to) Be a Man in 2018

Dan Matthews · Wednesday, December 13th, 2017

Ah the approaching New Year. A chance to look back at 2017 and wonder what, exactly, you can do differently. And if you're a man, a chance to do the exact opposite of what you've seen come to the fore in this sordid, strange time that is 2017.

When I think of men in film in 2017, I think of several characters that portrayed some of our worst qualities, because these are some of the qualities that many famous men portrayed this year in real life. I think of the unnamed poet (Javier Bardem) in Darren Aronofsky's film "[Mother!](#)," and I think of Dustin Hoffman as the washed-up artist Harold Meyerowitz in Noah Baumbach's "[The Meyerowitz Stories \(New and Selected\)](#)." I also think of Harold Meyerowitz's elderly friend, Paul Epstein.

Paul Epstein is the sexual offender of the story, a very minor character we barely see but mostly hear about. Harold Meyerowitz has three children, Danny (Adam Sandler), Matthew (Ben Stiller), and their sister, Jean (Elizabeth Marvel).

The grown-up Meyerowitz children are visiting their dad at the hospital when Paul Epstein arrives, and Jean takes off running. Danny and Matthew go after her, and in the woods by the hospital, she tells them about how Epstein exposed himself to her when they were kids.

Enraged, but not able to bring themselves to the point of beating up an old, decrepit Epstein, Danny and Matthew trash his car in the parking lot. After seeing what they've done, Jean delivers one of the movie's best lines: "I could smash every car in the parking lot and burn down the hospital and it wouldn't unf\*ck me up." She's like the many women in 2017 who have brought allegations of sexual misconduct against Hollywood creeps. They can get some form of revenge, but they're still left with scars.

Ironically, [Dustin Hoffman now stands accused](#) of sexually harassing an underage girl on the set of "Death of a Salesman" (1985). Hoffman's character in "The Meyerowitz Stories," Harold Meyerowitz, isn't a sexual predator, but he struggles with narcissism, something we're seeing a lot of from powerful men. He's a man who sees his art as a reflection of himself. He cares more about how people perceive his art, and thus how they perceive him, than he cares about his family. He's like the unnamed poet in "Mother!," a man willing to let his family life go to ruin for the sake of public adulation. Only, [according to Anthony Lane](#), critic for The New Yorker, "The theme of the artist as a ruinous autocrat is explored far more wittily here than in Darren Aronofsky's 'Mother!,' not least because Baumbach shows, in the case of Harold, how the will to power can outlast the wilting of a creative gift."

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In Aronofsky's "Mother!" (SPOILER ALERT) the unnamed poet first lets more and more people into his house because they're fans of his poetry. Then, after the poet's wife (Jennifer Lawrence) gives birth, the poet gives the child up to be ravaged and eaten by his fans, in what will go down as one of the gnarliest scenes of 2017 cinema. Baumbach's Meyerowitz may be a more witty example of the narcissist, but Aronofsky's is more piercing.

Whatever the case, both Aronofsky's unnamed poet and Baumbach's Meyerowitz are creative men at their worst. They're like Harvey Weinstein, Louis C.K. or Al Franken, men whose will to power has been accompanied by dereliction of their duty as men. All of them have lost their power as a result.

As a man who also happens to create things, I sometimes wonder where this nastiness we're seeing in all these Hollywood sexual harassers comes from. In my last post, I mused that perhaps it's because acting bad when you're a young boy is what gets you attention. Eventually, that attention becomes toxic, and you become toxic too.

Fathers need to give their sons the right type of attention. I recently came across a post about how teaching your son to shave is a modern-day ritual of manhood. The post has "an introduction by Homer Simpson," which is always a good way to introduce a post, but I was struck by how well the quote satirizes modern-day manhood. Homer says to Bart, "The three little sentences that will get you through life—Number one: Cover for me. Number two: Oh, good idea, boss! Number three: It was like that when I got here."

Teaching your son to shave is a positive form of attention—it reinforces manhood as something physical, something we can tend to and take responsibility for—yet the satire here from The Simpsons implies that men must learn how to be irresponsible and how to shirk culpability. That's how we get through life. Clearly, that's how someone like Harvey Weinstein or Donald Trump thinks they'll get through the allegations of harassment.

There's something amiss with male perceptions of sex and manhood in America, and this has come to light in a big way in 2017.

Another post reveals that nobody can agree on what constitutes cheating anymore. In a survey of a thousand people, only 76 percent said they consider sex with someone else to be cheating. The author also cites a study that found that "lots of people—men at twice the rate of women—use Facebook for so-called emotional cheating or 'back-burner relationships,' ones where you maintain a side flirtation just enough to keep it viable should your current relationship crash and burn." Only 55 percent of the people in the survey consider "emotional cheating" online to be a form of cheating.

The subject of manhood and sex is complex now because if a man acts on his so-called instinct, is he acting like a Harvey Weinstein, or is he just being a man? I heard a conversation on NPR in which the woman was happy her boss asked her out—they went on to be happily married.

At least in 2018, there will be these blaring examples of how not to be a man. Don't be like Weinstein. Don't be like Trump. Don't be like the narcissists in "Mother!" or "The Meyerowitz Stories." Some of us were lucky enough to have positive male role models who taught us how to

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shave—and how to treat women—when we were growing up. Some of us weren't. Let's help the ones who weren't learn how to be men, by helping them understand that being a man is not about forcing women to do what you want.

*Featured image: [Mother!/BagoGames/Flickr](#)*

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