

## Pamphlet 81

### GIRLIE-MEN, HE-MEN, & REAL MEN

By

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I chuckled when I heard movie star turned California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger use the insult “Girlie Men” to describe those he judged to be cowardly, pessimistic, and inauthentic opponents. No one would call the brave, rough, tough, and cartoonish “terminator” a Girlie Man in the fiction or non-fiction of his life.

Schwarzenegger and other He Men disdain Girlie Men as nuanced, sensitive, indecisive, and touchy-feely flip-flopping wind-surfers who cannot be trusted to stand up to evil-doers wherever they reside—in the family, the organization, and the world.

Girlie Men, according to this caricature, have a naïve and false innocence about life. Girlie Men do not see evil in others and do not see real dangers around them. Girlie Men do not want to acknowledge power or aggression much less use their own innate power and aggression. They close their eyes to reality. If they do not see danger, they do not have to stand up to injustice.

When faced with tough issues they cower into their innocence and make weakness, helplessness, and powerlessness virtues and appease those who use their creativity to destroy goodness. Girlie Men lack the fierceness to stand against evil, insanity, and immaturity. They need to find their outrage.

At the other extreme of the male continuum resides the He Man. The caricature of him is the superficial and arrogant action hero; the hubris filled and emotionally primitive woodchopper who swaggers confidently and mindlessly into messes determined to show how brave he is. Rigid and mechanical in the extreme, He Men pride themselves on being decisive decision makers who stick to their guns—even when wrong. They confuse stubbornness with strength, and they lack the courage to see themselves honestly, to admit mistakes, or to adapt to changing conditions.

Unlike the Girlie Men who don't see evil in others, these men do not see evil within themselves. They project it onto others.

The He Man model of manhood dominates today. It is also a failed model unable to solve the world's problems, many created by the abuses of paternalism. The level of abuse and violence perpetrated on nature, women, children, and upon each other by this model of manliness and by the men who embrace it increases with each failure to solve our problems. The violence, physical and emotional, is undeniable and staggers the soul of humankind.

The Girlie Man model is a reaction to the non-sustainable He Man model of manliness. The failures of the He Man model and the emergence of the Girlie Man foreshadow a paradigm shift still incomplete. Girlie Men and He Men sit at the extremes of the inherent nature of men. Each sacrifices important aspects of the self to maximize one aspect. Each model is for a world that does not exist. A synthesis is needed.

Girly Men: weak, needy, and ineffectual, feel terrified of and try to deny their natural aggression so necessary for life, growth, evolution, and sustainability. They must develop ferociousness. He Men try to deny and feel terrified of connection with others so necessary for health, compassion, community, and a sustainable species. Aggression is their only tool. They must learn humility, connection, and compassion.

Masculinity today is disconnection. We raise little boys to be disconnected. We socialize them through emotional injury and violence. We pull them away from their own expressiveness, from their emotions, from sensitivity to others (See Terrence Real: *How Do I Get through to You?*).

We created the men of today. We need a new model for men; a model that encompasses the best of the masculine AND the feminine sides of all men. We need a model of manhood that encompasses the best of Girlie Men and He Men and illuminates and manages their shadows. We need a model for Real Men who are sturdy and strong and can stand in truth and integrity.

Head coach Biff Poggi and assistant Joe Ehrmann, a former NFL football star turned minister and volunteer coach, teach the players on the Gilman high school (Maryland) football team a new model of masculinity. Their program of football and developing young men is called "Building Men for Others."

Being a man today, they teach, emphasizes relationships and living a purpose greater than oneself in service of others. A Real Man accepts responsibility and leads courageously. Integrity, empathy

for others, and a life of service to others is more important than material success. Coaches and players at Gilman express their love and pride in one another. Poggi and Ehrmann teach life lessons each week along with football.

Poggi and Ehrmann, He Men evolved to Real Men themselves, came to understand in their lives that we do a poor job of teaching boys to be men in our society. They recognize that many problems we deal with in our families, our workplaces, and in our society are symptoms of our failure to raise little boys to be connected to self, others, and the natural world.

Joe Ehrmann:

I have spent almost the last twenty years as a minister. Most of my work is in the inner city of Baltimore, dealing with issues of poverty and systemic racism and family disintegration. I would say that in order to make America a more just and fair society, I would boil it down to the single greatest crisis. And that primary, critical issue is a concept of what it means to be a man. If we don't fix our understanding, and get some proper definition of masculinity and manhood, I don't think we can address other issues.

Joe Ehrmann again:

Masculinity, first and foremost, ought to be defined in terms of relationships. It ought to be taught in terms of the capacity to love and to be loved. If you look over your life at the end of it...life wouldn't be measured in terms of success based on what you've acquired or achieved or what you own. The only thing that's really going to matter is the relationships that you had. It's gonna come down to this: What kind of father were you? What kind of husband were you? What kind of coach or teammate were you? What kind of son were you? What kind of brother were you? What kind of friend were you? Success comes in terms of relationships.

And I think of the second criterion—the only other criterion for masculinity—is that all of us ought to have some kind of cause, some kind of purpose in our lives that's bigger than our own individual hopes, dreams, wants, and desires. At the end of our life, we ought to be able to look back over it from our deathbed and know that somehow the world was a better place because we lived, we loved, we were other-centered, other-focused.

We teach young boys a false masculinity based on power and control. We teach them that manhood is sexual, athletic, and material prowess. Often men shame boys when they do not live up to our expectations of them—expectations often born of our own disappointments in ourselves. We send the message that many boys don't have the "right stuff." They then learn to live with the "right bluff." How many men around you live the "right bluff" in life?

How does the Gilman High School football team perform? They had back-to-back undefeated seasons in 1998 and 1999 that put them at the top of state rankings. Poggi and Ehrmann measure success in two ways: by wins and losses and by the amount of ministry they've done with their kids to prepare them for lives of meaning and value to others.

I have a son, a step-son, and four grandsons. I don't want them to be He Men disconnected from themselves, others, and the natural world. I want them to be emotional, vulnerable, and able to lean on others when appropriate. I want them to have empathy for others and to show mercy, warmth, and compassion to others. I want them to be attached to life and the intimacy with others that is our birthright.

I don't want them to be Girly Men. I want them to be responsible—to show up, stand up, and speak up to injustice in their lives. I want them to see the world as it is and to be bold and decisive. I want them to use their power for goodness.

I want these young men to focus on the relationships of their lives AND to live with bold purpose in their chosen calling. I want them to nurture the qualities within themselves that make them free and morally responsible men. I also want them to see their duty to honor values beyond the self. I want them to be Real Men whose higher levels of development lead to deeper levels of authenticity.

The world is in a time of paranoid darkness desperately in need of many great leaders. Terrorists and saviors alike use fear to achieve their objectives. Would be leaders demonize, feminize, and scapegoat their opponents to avoid talking about their own failures and the crisis's that loom ahead of us. Never has lying, distortion, manipulation, and misrepresentation been so blatant—personal destruction so sickening—ambition so craven.

Arnold Schwarzenegger identified a subtext of the Presidential campaign of 2004: men defining men—an underlying battle for the

male identity. We need to rise above fear and manipulation and choose our leaders with great care and thoughtfulness.

In addition to judging the character, the worldview, the performance, and the vision of the candidates, I will examine the depth and wholeness of the men who want to lead an interconnected world for new potential and deeper human authenticity comes from completeness. I will ask myself which candidate can lead from hope, wisdom, maturity, and creativity, and which do I most want the young men in my life to emulate.

More than anything, our world needs caring and intelligent leaders of deep and courageous authenticity. I will not follow the leader who tries to bribe or frighten me and in doing so diminishes me. I will not follow the leader who does not act boldly. I will follow the leader who asks me to be more than who I am.

RECOMMENDED READING: "Season of Life" by Jeffrey Marx