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Manly? Theythinks Not: An Analysis of How a Commercial Portrays the Modern Emasculation of Men

A common theme in commercials for traditionally masculine products is the freeing of men from the oppression of doing any activities that are considered feminine. Most of these commercials are purposefully overdramatic and aim for obvious humor and objection. With the recent Slim Jim commercials, this combination is used repeatedly through the theme of “Manmergency”- meaning a man is being emasculated by doing female-stereotyped things and can only be saved by the eating of beef jerky.

One particular commercial produced by the company addresses the need to resuscitate men from the death brought about from the boredom associated with anything mostly women enjoy. The commercial, titled “Shakespeare? Methinks Not”, begins with a “manbulance” driving to a “manmergency” of two men unwillingly watching a performance of one of Shakespeare’s plays in the park. The two men sit on picnic blankets with their girlfriends and roll their eyes at the make-upped, overly dramatic actor performing; this boredom ultimately results in the men collapsing. The “manbulance” paramedics then rush to the scene with steakhouse strips to save the men. The men are revived by the consumption of the moist and tender meat, which culminates in the slogan that Slim Jim products are “made from stuff guys need”.

While the commercial is obviously meant to be comical and over-the-top with use of an epic sounding score and the risk of death, it, unfortunately, only reinforces the idea that men need to be saved from anything remotely feminine. According to this commercial, unmanly activities include wearing nice, clean clothing, sitting on a picnic blanket, and watching a performance of a piece of classic literature. The heroes of this commercial, the paramedics, are clearly supposed to be the epitome of manliness with their scruffy beards, unkempt hair, fingerless gloves, old-style walkie talkies, and the driving of a camper-style ambulance through he woods. The themes of this advertisement are that the emasculation of men cannot continue and masculinity must be revived through the consumption of meat. These themes are understood by modern society rather well and have almost become culturally prevalent. More and more commercials are being released that call for men to fight against the feminization of the world by taking back the things that make them a man.

These commercials’ creators appeal to men who have felt the loss of their masculinity through conceding to doing anything womanly. With dainty females in delicate dresses, they are most certainly not attempting to reach women as possible consumers; instead, the commercial views women as controllers who have forced their boyfriends to attend such an emasculating event and who can only look on helplessly as their boyfriends collapse from the lack of manliness. The Slim Jim company’s campaign to “[save] guys from themselves” is literally stated in a similar commercial, aptly titled “Manbulance”, which features the automobile destroying a wedding arch as if marriage is the ultimate symbol of emasculation.

“Manbulance” is just one of the similar commercials to “Shakespeare? Methinks Not” that Slim Jim has released in reaction to the modern thought that men are no longer manly. The set-up in each commercial is related to the medical field because emasculation is a disease that needs to be treated with steakhouse strips, beef jerky, and an array of spices. In “Waiting Room”, numerous patients are waiting to hear their diagnosis; these “patients” include a man who enjoys yoga, a man daring to wear a matching sweater with his girlfriend, and a man on a tantric bicycle. To the commercial’s makers, these things are feminine activities and need to be cured, but they are not as extremely emasculating as the activities performed by the patients in the intensive care. In the commercial, also titled “Intensive Care”, men are being rehabilitated after such feminine acts of ironing jeans, trading in a sporty car for a mini van, and attending an ex’s engagement party. In this commercial, making your clothes look nice, picking a safe car over a retro one, and going to support a former love in his or her future happiness are strictly girly activities that should not be practiced by or enforced on men.

These Slim Jim commercials may have been created just to make their products memorable through association with humor and drama, but they also reflect on the idea that as women become more equal to men, men must fight for all that makes them manly. With the influx of femininity in recent years, men are now being urged to crave anything that oozes manliness, whether that is a sports car or beef jerky. The commercials become an outlet for frustrated men to scream their misgivings about becoming the inferior sex. Theses commercials, on the surface, are jokes and dramedies, but, on a deeper level, they speak the “truth” to men; this truth is that their manliness is being challenged and they need to defend it through the consumption of moist and tender meat produced by Slim Jim. In Slim Jim’s view, a man is not a man until he has fought against femininity with valiant weapon of beef jerky. In a more worldly view, a man is not a man until he has overcome emasculation and been the declared the superior sex.