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The quest for a better way to remove facial hair or to shave has taken many twists and turns over the centuries. The years between 1800 and 1900 have been coined the “Golden Era” of the straight edge razor. Men went to barbers to have their mustaches and beards carefully trimmed. Interchangeable blade-razor sets and “seven-day” sets were popular in the 1800s. At the last turn of the century, King Gillette founded what would become a corporate giant, based on a simple yet essential invention: the safety razor with disposable blades. One morning in 1895, Gillette, now living in Boston, had a revelation. If he could put a sharp edge on a small square of sheet steel, then he could market a safety razor blade that could be thrown away and readily replaced when it grew dull. Gillette visited metallurgists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), who assured him his idea was impossible. It took Gillette six years to find an engineer, William Emery Nickerson (an MIT-trained inventor), who could produce the blade that Gillette wanted. The Gillette Safety Razor Company survived and thrived. Over the next few decades, it expanded its product line, for example, with the introduction of Foamy shaving cream (1953) and Right Guard antiperspirant (1960). Gillette also acquired a number of personal care product (Braun, Oral-B) and writing implement (Parker, Waterman) companies.

Gillette has been well-known for its brand and its market leadership in the shaver industry. In 2000, it had 63% of the US market share in dollar terms, and had been consistently exceeding 60% for the past thirty years, leaving its competitors far behind.

Gillette has its own R&D teams, one located in Reading, England and the other in Boston. The in-house teams enable Gillette to have dedicated and focused effort in designing new products and improving existing products. The responsiveness of the teams was demonstrated in the launch of Good News! in 1976, for competing with BIC¡¦s single-blade disposable razor launched in 1975. The most successful three thin blades in the history are the Mach3 in 1998 which was named winner of the American Marketing. Gillette liked to think of itself as a giant research laboratory. It spent 2.2 % of sales on R&D, twice as much as the average consumer products company. Although a leader in the market, Gillette should not underestimate its major competitors. Schick was able to produce blades that fit on Gillette razors and BIC shared 45% of the disposable segment in volume terms. Advertising campaigns were planned in year 2000 by both Schick and BIC for $20 million and $16 million respectively. Gillette also faced the challenge of product imitation. The antitrust laws made enforcement of patent rights difficult. Although the competitors tended to share the remaining market portion, this nevertheless hindered the further growth of market share by Gillette.

With the launch of Fusion Pro Glide, Gillette’s most expensive razor to date, the brand has made a determined effort to change its marketing strategy. With all of its previous razors, Gillette has failed to directly acknowledge the growing male consumer skepticism that has surrounded each of its product launches. However, in 2010, Gillette took on a fresh approach, using consumers to build the brand and reduce male skepticism. Rather than using overt claims of superiority to sell its shaving products, Gillette placed the Fusion ProGlide marketing campaign into the hands of its consumers, asking customers to try the product and also leveraging the social-media space.

At the core of the brands marketing strategy has been the concept of “turning skeptics into believers and shaving into gliding”, with many of its pre and post-launch marketing programs attempting to communicate this message to consumers. This unique strategy of consumer focused marketing has enabled the Gillette Fusion Pro Glide to achieve strong market sales despite the still somewhat fragile economy and strong competition from the rival Energizer Schick Hydro (a shaving. Several months ago, Gillette aired a new ad that takes the company’s 30-year-old slogan, “The Best a Man Can Get,” and turns it into an introspective reflection on toxic masculinity, changing their slogan to “The Best Men Can Be.” The ad depicts men and boys engaging in bullying, fighting, discrimination, and sexual harassment. A voiceover asks, “Is this the best a man can get?”

The ad goes on to say it is time for men to stop making excuses and to renounce the idea that “boys will be boys.” Gillette concludes by showing images of men holding other men accountable, breaking up fights, championing their daughters, and intervening when men sexually harass women. Gillette named the add, “What is a Man?” Reaction to this ad was swift, widespread, and sharply divided. At the writing of this article, it has received over 29 million views on YouTube with over 774,000 likes, but 1.4 million dislikes. What explains the disparity?

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There is a longing in the human heart for strong, incorruptible manhood, something better than we usually see in this fallen world. Millennials, to whom the ad was targeted, see the ad positively. A study conducted by Mediapost revealed that people under 30 were 50 percent more positive toward the ad than 30-to-49-year-olds and over 10 times more likely than those over 50 to see it positively. Women were also 50 percent more likely to see the add positively than men.

These findings correspond with my unscientific poll, as well. The Millennials with whom I spoke, though biblically conservative, saw the ad as a courageous effort to take on bullying and sexual harassment. The commercial tries to point to a better image of a man, one who uses his power to help and protect others, never to degrade and destroy them. And it rightly suggests that boys are always watching men for their cues on masculinity. Who could argue with that?

The majority of men, however, viewed the ad negatively. In their eyes, the video was an example of the worst kind of stereotyping. The message was, “Men are sex-crazed, harassing, groping bullies. But,” says the video narrative, “a few good men have overcome this norm of evil masculine behavior.” Gillette then scolds the evil masculine majority to be like this minority.

Ilan Srulovicz, the CEO of Egard Watch Co., was so incensed with Gillette’s ad that he had his company produce a video entitled, “What is a Man: A Response to Gillette.” The video begins with the question, “Is a man brave?” showing a firefighter with a girl in his arms and the caption “Men account for 93% of workplace fatalities.” The narrator next asks, “Is a man a hero?” showing a returning soldier holding his daughter who holds an American flag and the statistic that over 97% of war fatalities are men. The narrator continues with “Is a man a protector, vulnerable, disposable, broken, and ends with, “Is a man…trying?”

A Longing for Incorruptible Manhood

What both sides of this contentious debate hold in common is a vision of masculinity at its best. Gillette reminds us that masculinity was designed to be something more than becoming sex-crazed, abusive, and selfish. Egard Watch’s picture of a firefighter rescuing a little girl is a (common grace) glimpse of manhood as it was designed to be — sacrificial, protective, self-denying. Beneath both videos is an attraction to the best masculinity has to offer. There is a longing in the human heart for strong, incorruptible manhood, something better than we usually see in this fallen world. It is the longing for broken masculinity to be fully restored to its glory.

Many in our culture tell us that the solution to broken masculinity is to eliminate the biblical teaching of complementarianism. The biblical view that men and women equally bear the image of God but have different roles in the home and in the church is labeled patriarchy, a repressive social construct used primarily by white male Christians to reinforce male privilege. The new American Psychological Association “Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men” (released in August of 2018), states, “Privilege refers to unearned sources of social status, power, and institutionalized advantage experienced by individuals by virtue of their culturally valued and dominant social identities (e.g., white, Christian, male).” In other words, broken masculinity is the fault of Christianity, which teaches that men are to be the heads of their homes.

In such a world, it would be easy to take the path of least resistance and minimize the biblical teaching of God’s design for male and female. After all, why create a stumbling block for the gospel? Such a response, though, misunderstands today’s millennials. Radical feminists who seek to eliminate male/female distinctions are a small minority of the millennial population. The vast majority recognize that male/female differences are real and want help knowing how to make masculinity and femininity work in their own lives.

Work Cited

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