



TV Men Stupid by James Seidler

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If network television is to be believed the male gender of the human species can safely be compared to the dodo of old in that its overwhelming stupidity will soon lead to its inevitable extinction. The dignity of men on the tube is subject to constant assault, as in broadcast after broadcast they are portrayed as unthinking nincompoops whose sole salvation is a competent woman blessed with the patience to lead them away from their natural tendencies towards idiocy and self destruction. To put it in caveman terms, which executive producers appear to view as the full breadth and range of male communication, tv men stupid.

This is most apparent in commercials. The average man in tv commercials is prone to a hyperbolic range of stupidity, from blowing the checking account on the impulse of the moment (generally Budweiser, Big Macs, and megabytes) to building turbo-powered flame machines out of some subconscious sense of masochism. They also really dig boobs...well, ok, fair enough, although I'd like to offer that knocking oneself unconscious or ending up with one's head lodged in large animal orifices while in pursuit of cleavage doesn't happen as often in real life as commercials would have you believe. Once or twice a year tops.

In any case, the argument for the descent of man in advertising can be made clear in five words: David Arquette and Carrot Top. Incidentally, these same five words can be used to make arguments for American culture's decline, post-partum abortion, and "Most Likely Coke Overdose of 2010." With regard to advertising, the AT&T ads done by both have left behind a moronic stain on the male psyche. Proof of their dubious legacy is the fact that a Google search for "Carrot Top ads" serves up as its number one result, "Better Dead Than Red: Those Awful AT&T ads starring Carrot Top," which is followed by such gems as "I hate Carrot Top the way everyone hates Carrot Top: fleetingly and vividly," and finally, "Arquette was bad enough, but now those craven AT&T bastards have foisted Carrot Top on us." It appears the male stupidity featured in these ads is evident to all, yet is still inescapable.

In any case, the behavior showcased in commercials is only a sampler of that which is available in the larger world of sitcoms. A case can be made that the male idiocy that takes place in most sitcoms is indistinguishable from the atmosphere of cretinism that pervades the surroundings. After all, sitcoms are largely about people acting stupid. Still, if someone's going to accidentally set themselves on fire while tinkering around, who's it going to be? My point exactly. Hell, Tim Allen based a whole tv series on self-abuse, and I don't mean the interesting kind.

I do realize that the current rash of male idiocy on television is largely a response to years of paternalism and patronization directed towards women, both on television and in larger society. After all,

through much of history there was the whole "no rights" thing, which wasn't entirely fair in retrospect. I'm sure that many women wrote essays in the 60's decrying the happy housewife stereotype of the time. Even now, portrayals of women on television rarely stray far from the sex object/overbearing shrew standards. In many ways, guys are just getting what they deserve.

But, does it have to be so thorough? Does the evisceration of male self-image have to be so complete? Couldn't there be a very special *Everybody Loves Raymond* where the title character solves a quadratic equation or something? Better yet, bring MacGyver back. That was a guy who knew what he was doing.

As it stands now, the sole bastion of male competence that remains on television is violence. If you see someone committing senseless murder in an alleyway or exacting bloody revenge with a well placed jump kick, it's probably a guy. Sure, there are the occasional exceptions, such as Sydney from *Alias* and Xena Warrior Princess, but most of the gratuitous violence carried out on the small screen is carried out at the hands of men. What do I have to say to that? Thank goodness. At least we're still good at *something*. With some hard work, dedication, and, of course, oversight from a patient woman, we just might be able to turn our penchant for mindless destruction into something better, something more. Until that day comes though, I guess we'll just have to satisfy ourselves with sticking our tongues in toasters and walking into walls when bedazzled by shiny objects.

After all, it's just our nature.