

# A cutting-edge campaign

By  [Brendan Seery](#)

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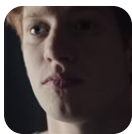
An Orchid to Gillette for putting an issue out there, and DA, you get the 'How Not to Win Friends and Influence People' Onion for this week.



Screen grab from the ad.

There has been a lot of debate around the world this past week about the new ad for Gillette – one of the biggest producers of razors in the world – which tackles the thorny subject of “toxic masculinity” head on.

It’s thorny because the pushback – from a lot of men, it seems – to the ad is to challenge the very concept of toxic masculinity or to say “don’t tar us all with the same brush...”



## Gillette's 'We Believe' ad receives mixed feedback

15 Jan 2019



The brush, in this case, is pretty broad, because the ad – which turns around Gillette’s classic “the best a man can get” slogan into “the best a man can be” – makes the point that, even though not all men are guilty of sexual abuse, chauvinism, violence or bullying, many are passive “enablers” because they say nothing when they see it happening.

The men who laugh when women are patronised or ridiculed, who snigger at sexist jokes, who don't treat women as equals and who think things like bullying are part of the "toughen up" process boys must go through – they are equally part of the problem. At least that's what the ad – made by a woman – says.

I am certainly not one who is comfortable with the sometimes illogical feminist ranting one sees and hears frequently these days. I once took issue with a woman who uttered the old "all men are rapists" war cry of feminists. "Oh really?" I said, "You include Madiba? The Pope?"

If you are going to characterise the behaviour of men based on their physical equipment, you could just as logically say: "All women are sluts..."

*“ The danger in using sweeping generalisations is that they can lead to sweeping actions. Call people cockroaches – as happened in Rwanda – and you open the way to genocide. ”*

I am also critical, from a purely marketing perspective, about why a brand decided that its mission would be to change society. The business of a brand, of a business, is to make money, not to crusade. If you want to do that join a church, or Greenpeace...

Also, I find it curious that a brand would risk alienating its biggest market (women constitute a small percentage of Gillette's buyers) by making them out to be punks. You may well be right, you may have the best intentions, but you run the risk of a boycott.

I am also not at all comfortable with the fact that all of the "good guys" in the ad are clean shaven. I have a beard... does that make me a sexual predator or bully?

Having said all that, though, I think Gillette deserves an Orchid from me for putting the issue out there, front and centre. We won't reduce this sort of male behaviour unless we make it socially unacceptable. And we do that by speaking up and stepping in.



The DA's Life Esidimeni billboard.

Don't you just love the way the Democratic Alliance (DA) has turned itself into the victim after there was a [reaction to its](#)

[billboard](#) – possibly one of the most insensitive pieces of marketing communication in this country for the last year – and it was defaced?

The DA claims it is being targeted because it has focused on the fact that so many people have died on the ANC's watch.

There is some question about whether the action was actually carried out by angry relatives of victims of the Life Esidimeni tragedy, when 144 state patients died after they were removed from the places where they were being cared for and transported to inadequate substitutes.



### 3 lessons on ethics from the Life Esidimeni tragedy

3 Jul 2018



However, the crux of the matter is that the DA used the names of the dead – which included those who died after being gunned down by police at Marikana in 2012 – without the knowledge or permission of the families.

Legally, they're safe – these names are in the public domain – but when it comes to morality, that's an entirely different question.

I am astounded that no-one moved to veto this – even on the grounds that it might (as it did) backfire and hurt the party badly.

I must ask: would you (the DA and your ad agency) have dared to do this if the victims and their families were white?

So, DA, you get the “How Not to Win Friends and Influence People” Onion for this week.

But, for good measure, you also get the Cellphone Spam Memorial Onion for your unsolicited voice message to me (from what looked like an ordinary number), where your leader, Mmusi Maimane, urged me to register to vote today for a better South Africa.



### 34 hilarious tweets from Mmusi Maimane's #AskMmusi Twitter town hall

Stuart Thomas 14 May 2015



A better South Africa, where you barge into people's privacy by subterfuge?

Great liberal concept for a great liberal party... or did you not compare your marketing methods to your political ideology and ethos?

## ABOUT BRENDAN SEERY

Brendan Seery has been in the news business for most of his life, covering coups, wars, famines - and some funny stories - across Africa. Brendan Seery's *Orchids and Onions* column ran each week in the *Saturday Star* in Johannesburg and the *Weekend Argus* in Cape Town.

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