

Can advertising "Stop Rape"?

 By [Gail Schimmel](#)

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I hate it when this happens, but I'm having a controversial opinion, and I won't rest until it's out. It's about this Primedia "Stop Rape" campaign, and before I start ranting, I better state some things clearly.

The first is that I am (rather obviously, I should hope) vehemently horrified by the rape situation in this country, and by Anene Booysen's death, and by the atrocities women locally and internationally are suffering.

The second is that I am an expert in advertising law, and maybe plain language, and writing - not in rape politics. Although along the way I've managed to pick up a psychology degree or two. So, I am going to try to limit my thoughts to the advertising aspect of the Stop Rape campaign, and the rules around advertising in a disturbing manner.

So, let me start on Friday morning, and I have just (thank goodness) dropped my small children at school. I turn 702 up, hoping to get a bit of radio enjoyment in the two blocks I travel home, and I find myself subjected to a horror story about a child being raped by a school driver. Now the next thing I must be clear about is that I turned the radio off when the words "her bladder collapsed" sounded; and I continued to turn off anything disturbing during the day. So I am not an expert on the entire contents of the campaign.

Nonetheless, I arrived home feeling sick and personally violated, struggling to focus on my work. Which is most probably the intention of the advertisement.

Getting the message across

Now here's the thing. *The general rule about advertisements around social issues and wrongs is that they can go further, and shock, and disturb, as compared to advertising for products.* So the disturbing images we saw for a few years of accident victims from drunk driving and speeding incidents was justified because it might scare us out of doing the same. And a horrifying ad I had to consider when working at the ASA, showing a baby drowning in the running bath while its drunk parents fought, was justified because maybe an alcoholic would get help based on that ad.

In other words, the sense of violation the viewer or listener feels is justified because people who see the ad might change their behaviour patterns as a result.

Now let's look at the Stop Rape ad that I turned off. Is that ad going to scare people into stopping rape? In the first place, I don't think that the majority of violent rapists are listening to intellectual talk radio. I know that that is a generalisation; and I know that many rapes are committed by men that are professional and intellectual, BUT I think the particular type of rape

that is horrifying us as a nation, the type of rape that killed Anene, is committed by groups of violent and uneducated men. Not middle-class liberals dropping their kids at school and hoping to hear a bit of talk radio.

Second, those rapists who ARE listening to 702 and other stations involved - do you think that they suddenly go "Oh gosh, I had no *idea* that people minded. Oh silly me, I'll just stop raping people right now."

Will shock tactics work? Unlikely

And as to getting the government to do something about rape - making them feel our outrage - well, I struggle to believe that they are neglecting rape out of a particular choice. I like (I use that word loosely) to think that they neglect rape convictions and captures and sensitive policing out of their general incompetence rather than out of a special focussed negligence. And will bigoted misogynists, who hand down sentences that are lenient because the raped child was treated carefully, suddenly say, "Oh I thought everyone agreed. I'll be stricter from now on"? I doubt it.

So where is the justification for these disturbing commercials? It's not going to change the behaviour of rapists. It might make government slightly more sensitised; but we're talking about people who can't even feed the nation competently. So I really wouldn't hold my breath for remarkable change.

Perhaps the justification lies in the fact that it has started dialogue and thinking - and maybe someone will have a clever idea that actually works. *And I totally agree that if one fewer woman is raped because of this campaign, then it worked.* I just struggle to believe that that will be the case. So I struggle to believe that the sense of personal violation that I had from this campaign is, in fact, justified. (And again, to be clear, I would be happy to feel this comparatively mild violation if I thought it would help. I just don't.)

Let's hope that I am wrong.

ABOUT GAIL SCHIMMEL

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