

“I’m here to work! Not to flirt!”
“Take It Off The Agenda:” A Social Campaign Against Sexual Harassment in the
Workplace

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Presentation of the Problem

At present, there is a dearth of research dedicated exclusively to sexual harassment in the workplace in Poland. Furthermore, existing reports show significant differences in the prevalence of, number of reports and responses to sexual harassment acts. For these reasons, it is difficult to estimate the full extent of the problem of office-based sexual harassment in Polish society. Many NGOs, such as the Center for Women's Rights, note that sexual harassment is a serious and underreported problem. “Many victims do not report abuse, or withdraw harassment claims in the course of police investigations out of shame or fear of losing their job. However, the topic of sexual harassment is openly reported and discussed in the media, which helps to heighten social awareness of the problem. During the first six months of 2008, police reported 63 cases of sexual harassment, as compared with 82 cases during 2007 (U.S. Dept. of State report).”¹

According to the most recent research conducted by the Center for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) for the magazine “Wysokie Obcasy” in 2014, the age group most vulnerable to sexual harassment in general is that of individuals under 38 years of age. Within this group, 31.8% of women and 27.2% of men report having been victims of sexual harassment. These numbers decrease within the older age groups. In total 24% of Polish women and 21.4% of Polish men have experienced sexual harassment². On the other hand, the results of a poll conducted by the movement Hollaback! Polska in 2012 showed that 85% of women and 44% of men declared being victims of the sexual harassment in the public sphere, specifically. Almost all of the individuals polled stated that they had experienced sexual harassment more than once in their lifetime. According to Hollaback!, harassers are most frequently men (78%), and in cases where women are the victims of the harassment, the number increases to 98%. Men are almost as frequently harassed by men as by women.³ The above great difference in number shows that possibly there is a problem of recognizing sexual harassment as an issue in other contexts than public sphere. Other problem may be the lack of education in that area: not all of the behaviors which constitutes sexual harassment may be treated as such by the respondents of the researches.

On the specific note of sexual harassment in the workplace, the research conducted for “Wysokie Obcasy” showed that 33.1% of women, and 50% of men, who were victims of sexual harassment generally experienced this harassment by their co-

1. *Stop Violence Against Women. A project of The Advocates for Human Rights*, Xenia Kastsevich, Last updated: 10 October 2009, <http://www.stopvaw.org/poland2>

2. Joanna Roszak, *Kobieta w Polsce, Niemoralne propozycje*, http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,96856,17253355,Kobieta_w_Polsce__Niemoralne_propozycje.html

3. *Poland has the power to end street harassment, Research on harassment in public spaces in Poland*, Joanna Roszak, Greta Gober, Hollaback Polska 2012 <http://polska.ihollaback.org/files/2012/09/Harassment-in-public-spaces.-Hollaback-research-results-from-Poland.1.pdf>

workers. Another 26.4% of women and 22.5% of men declared that they had been victimized in their workplace by their boss.⁴ The results of the previous research conducted by CBOS on sexual harassment in 2007 showed that 22% of workers had experienced or witnessed verbal sexual harassment in their workplace. An additional 7% claimed to witness or experience sexual harassment in a physical form from their co-workers. However, when asked solely about their personal experience, only 3% stated being victimized by colleagues and 2% by their boss in their workplace.⁵

According to another report on different forms of harassment in the workplace from 2014, only 1% of employees indicated that they had been subjects of sexual harassment as opposed to other forms of improper conduct in their workplace. Here, sexual harassment was defined as unwanted or inappropriate suggestions of a sexual nature.⁶ Such statistics are much higher in some other international reports. According to the report of United Nations Secretary-General from 2006, between 40% and 50% of women in the European Union experience unwanted sexual advances, physical contact or other forms of sexual harassment at work.⁷

For Joanna Roszak, a researcher from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (SWPS), the fact that there is a public debate around sexual harassment in the workplace, and that we hear more and more about sexual harassment in the public sphere, is not enough. Roszak argues that the issue is still absent from the front pages of newspapers and from the parliamentary hall, and this is a problem. As she writes in an article for "Wysokie Obcasy," "sexual harassment in the public sphere is not even recognized by Polish law (sexual harassment in the workplace constitutes an exception)."⁸

Niemoralne Propozycje: Molestowanie w miejscu pracy, a report published by the "Fundacja Feminoteka" in 2008, highlights the fact that sexual harassment in Poland remains a taboo. *Niemoralne Propozycje* suggests that sexual harassment in the workplace is overlooked as an issue because it is commonly treated as an affair or flirting rather than unwanted, pathological behavior. Therefore, according to the report, educational campaigns in Polish society about the nature of sexual harassment are desperately needed.⁹

Despite the fact that some research suggests that the issue of sexual harassment is present in Polish media, we believe that it is not sufficiently present in public debate. Reasons for this might be fear of public backlash, a victim's feeling of shame or embarrassment, or an insufficient public consciousness of what behaviors may constitute sexual harassment. Until now, most of the public discussion around sexual harassment in

4. Badanie CBOS „Komu żyje się lepiej” dla Wysokich Obcasów, in: Roszak Joanna, *Kobieta w Polsce, Niemoralne propozycje*, http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,96856,17253355,Kobieta_w_Polsce__Niemoralne_propozycje.html.

5. CBOS, *Molestowanie seksualne. Komunikat z badań*, Warszawa 2007, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2007/K_035_07.PDF.

6. *Szykany w miejscu pracy, Badanie CBOS NR 109/2014*, Warszawa, Lipiec 2014

7. UN General Assembly, 2006, *In-depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/61/122/Add.1, p. 42, New York, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#sthash.A60vC53m.dpuf>

8. Joanna Roszak, *Kobieta w Polsce, Niemoralne propozycje*, http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,96856,17253355,Kobieta_w_Polsce__Niemoralne_propozycje.html

9. Fundacja Feminoteka, Publikacja zawierająca materiały z konferencji *Niemoralne propozycje. Molestowanie w miejscu pracy*. 2008, http://www.feminoteka.pl/downloads/molestowanie_broszura_internet.pdf, p.

the workplace has focused on the sexual affairs of well-known public figures or politicians, such as those cases concerning the leaders of the “Samoobrona” party in 2006/2007 and the renowned journalist, Kamil Durczok, in 2015. Both of these cases carefully explored the feelings of victims involved. However, it is doubtful that either has had any real effect on the sexual harassment experienced by average workers in reality.

Sexual Harassment in Polish Labor Law

In the Polish law sexual harassment is defined in the Antidiscrimination Act and in the Work Code. Both Acts stipulate that lack of consent and objection to harassment are necessary for the legal acts to be effective. In other words, in order to be able to file a harassment complaint against a co-worker we would have to be able to prove that we objected to their behavior. Thus objection must be expressed firmly, to make it clear that such behavior is unacceptable¹⁰. Sexual harassment in the workplace may be prosecuted under Articles 11(2) and 11(3) of the Labor Code, which address equal treatment and discrimination in working relationships, respectively. Sexual harassment is also prohibited under Article 18(3)(a)(4,5,6), which states that, "discrimination in reference to gender shall also comprise all unaccepted behavior of a sexual character or behavior referring to the gender of the employee whose objective or effect comprises transgression against the dignity, or insult or humiliation, of an employee; such behavior may comprise physical, verbal, or non-verbal elements (sexual harassment)." The Labor Code (Art. 94 (3)) also has a definition of bullying and lays the responsibility to counteract bullying at work on the employer.¹¹ Therefore, protection against sexual harassment exists in Polish legal system. However, it is worth noting that the issue is barely reported and brought to courts. In 2013 only 0.8% of all cases related to discrimination in the workplace that were brought to Labor Court were related to claim for damages in connection with sexual harassment.¹²

Project Goals

The data included above led our team to the conclusion that the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace requires a greater presence in public discourse. We decided to tailor our campaign to students preparing to enter the workforce as well as young professionals, as this demographic is most vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse. Furthermore, our team decided that this target group would be easily accessible through a social media platform. In this way, the “Take It Off The Agenda” social campaign was designed to empower young people and show them that it is possible to respond to sexual harassment. It is our hope that educating a younger generation about the signs of sexual

10. *Poland has the power to end street harassment, Research on harassment in public spaces in Poland*, Joanna Roszak, Greta Gober, Hollaback Polska 2012
<http://polska.ihollaback.org/files/2012/09/Harassment-in-public-spaces.-Hollaback-research-results-from-Poland.1.pdf>, p. 11.

11. *Stop Violence Against Women. A Project of The Advocates for Human Rights*, Xenia Kastsevich, Last updated: 10 October 2009, <http://www.stopvaw.org/poland2>

12. *Dyskryminacja, mobbing i molestowanie seksualne w pracy. Ewidencja spraw o odszkodowania w sądach pracy w 2013 roku w ujęciu retrospektywnym 2009-2012*, Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości, p. 5.

harassment and ways to combat it may challenge existing workplace cultures that “tolerate” this form of sexual violence. By initiating a conversation about sexual harassment in its many forms, “Take It Off The Agenda” seeks support the cultivation of office cultures free of sexual harassment and sexism.

Campaign Visuals

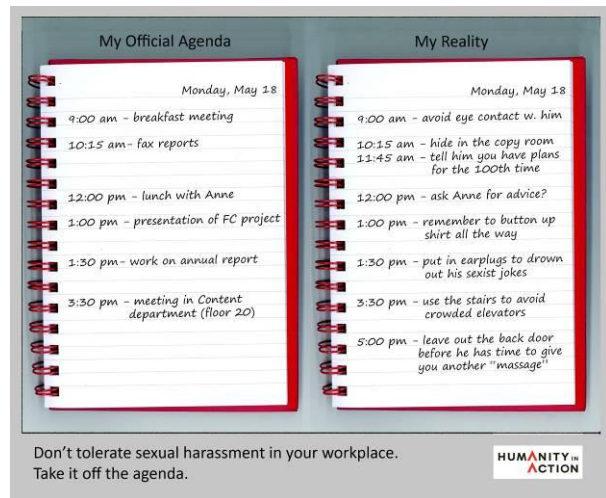
The “Take It Off The Agenda” social campaign was designed for a target group of graduating students entering the workforce, and young professionals. With this audience in mind, our team played with “empowering,” “thought-provoking” and “ironic” tones in our visuals. While we were careful not to trivialize or over-simplify the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace, we also veered away from the traditional scare-tactics of many sexual harassment campaigns. In this way, the “Take It Off The Agenda” campaign seeks to inspire action and challenge people to interrogate workplace cultures that normalize sexual harassment, not just emphasize that sexual harassment *is a bad thing*.

The use of office supplies as the central motif for the campaign acts as a metaphor for how sexual harassment has become normalized and integrated into workplace culture. “Take It Off The Agenda” seeks to explode those workplace cultures in which sexual harassment, like office supplies, has become mundane. Our first graphics series, “Post-Its,” follow the basic form of a message board covered with office tasks written on post-it notes, followed by one highlighted post-it note revealing some form of sexual harassment that the note-owner is “tasked” with on a given day. The viewer is able to empathize with the owner of the message board, as they may possess a very similar message board with similar tasks themselves. However, the highlighted post-it note is meant to come as a surprise to the viewer. One would never expect to see a post-it note reminding someone to “give the boss a massage.” Therefore, such a message challenges the viewer to think critically about the inappropriate tasks they may witness or experience in the office and yet downplay as acceptable.

The “Post-Its” graphics series addresses the demographic diversity within our target group, as the post-its allude to female, male, and gender neutral victims. This graphics series is also relatable in that it highlights young professionals in various office environments: an architect’s office, a research lab, and a neutral office space. In summary, the post-it design, coupled with the campaign slogan, “take it off the agenda,” shows that acts of sexual harassment have become embedded in workplace culture, but that any given individual has the power to take down the post-it note and stand up to such behavior. With this interactive component in mind, we also constructed a post-it graphic with the highlighted post-it left blank for an audience member to fill in with their own office behavior they would like to see “taken off the agenda.”



Our second graphics concept, “Comparative Agendas,” takes on the somewhat more serious, “thought-provoking” tone. Here one can see a typical “agenda” on the left hand side, full of meetings and office tasks. This exact same agenda is then copied on the right, except that the “typical” agenda items have been replaced with a slew of things the agenda-owner must do to avoid and cope with being sexually harassed at work. The headings, “My Official Agenda,” and “My Reality,” explain the differences between these two agendas. Once again, our campaign was wary of sending the scary or intimidating message to our target group that “sexual harassment is bad and it *will* happen to you.” Rather, the “Comparative Agendas” changes this message slightly to “sexual harassment already exists in many workplaces, but should be brought to light and not be tolerated.” This graphic seeks to capture the full seriousness of the issue, and yet focus inspiring the viewer to action to help and support the agenda-owner’s daily struggle.



The video elements for the “Take It Off the Agenda” campaign follow a similar “ironic” and “thought-provoking” tone as the campaign visuals. However, the videos also aim at a more “funny,” and “energizing” spirit. Both the sexual harassment “mini-series,” as well as our longer feature, “Take It Off The Agenda,” employ techniques of high contrast to make their points. In the mini-series, the viewer witnesses some instance of sexual harassment followed by a “silly” or “ridiculous” reaction. Reactions include: hitting the perpetrator with a fly swatter or giant pencil, or even spraying the perpetrator down with water guns. From here, the viewer is then asked if they find the reaction “silly,” “exaggerated” or “ridiculous,” and are challenged to think about how they would react instead. Here, a funny scene is coupled with a thought-provoking statement.

Such a contrast is even more apparent in our longer movie, “Take It Off the Agenda.” Here, the viewer witnesses a situation in which the “boss” in an office sexually harasses a young employee verbally. The rest of the movie is then divided into two “takes.” In the first take, the employee’s coworkers valiantly come to her rescue, pelting the “boss” with office supplies and found object. Such an outburst causes the “boss” to leave. However, in the second take, the employee’s coworkers do not intervene, and the workplace culture that tolerates sexual harassment is perpetuated. The viewer is once again challenged to think about his or her own role in perpetuating negative workplace culture with the question, “What do you want *your* office to look like?”

Implementation Strategy and Results

Our team decided to run the “Take It Off The Agenda” social campaign on a Facebook platform with support from a content-based website. Our reasons for choosing Facebook were two-fold. On the one hand, Facebook is the social media network most widely used by our target audience. On the other, it is also the social media platform that our team members had the most experience using.

One question our team faced in developing our online platform was about the language of the content. From the beginning, we intended to design the Facebook content in both English and Polish. However, this made our postings awkward or inefficient at times. For example, we published several of the graphics in their Polish and English versions at the same time, as a package. The problem with posting graphics as a package is that the “likes” attributed to them are attached to the packaged graphics as a group, not as individual images. Therefore, each individual image receives less attention. On the other hand, posting graphics sequentially risks the fact that the two posts may “cannibalize” each other in terms of media visibility.

To avoid some of these problems, we designed our videos without dialogue so as to be accessible to a multi-lingual audience. That said, the subtitles and closing credits in the videos are written only in English. Our website, aside from the welcome page, was written only in Polish.

The Facebook fan page “Wykreśl z grafiku. Take it off the agenda” was set up on 14th June. At this stage we uploaded only a cover photo and profile picture. We started regular activity on Facebook on June 17th. Using our basic knowledge of the Facebook publishing algorithm, we decided to post 3 times a day – around 1 PM, 4:30 PM and 8 PM. In anticipation of publishing an episode of our video “mini-series,” we also posted a picture with a preview of the new episode the day before. The videos, both the “mini-series” and longer movie, were consistently published at 8 PM during the peak online hours for our target group.

We decided to promote two of our posts after we published the long movie: the movie itself and a graphic with a blank post-it note that encouraged our followers to contribute their own thoughts or experiences to the campaign. Promoting these two content items significantly increased the outreach of the posts, but did not increase viewer engagement with them. In other words, we did not notice any significant increase in post “likes” or shares as a result of the promotion. We also contacted some other fan pages on Facebook to ask them to promote our fan page. The only response we received before the end of the campaign was from the Fundacja Feminoteka fan page, which published a promotional post for us on the evening of June 22nd.

Lastly, we also uploaded some pictures from our offline post-it event. The offline post-it event was organized in response to the fact that we struggled to engage in any kind of dialogue with our audience on Facebook. On the afternoon of June 22nd, our team travelled to Krakowskie Przedmieście Street and asked young people about their workplace cultures. Additionally, we asked if there was anything that these individuals wanted to “take off the agenda” at their work. If so, our participants then wrote these inappropriate behaviors on a post-it note and added it to our message board. Some of the people we engaged with shared stories about their experience with sexual harassment,

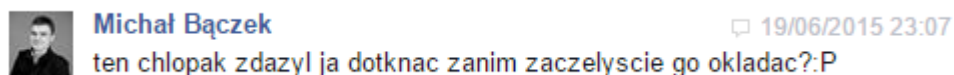
both verbal and physical. On the other hand, we also met people who said that the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace doesn't exist in Poland.

Feedback From Our Followers

- 1) When our team shared the first video featuring a male perpetrator, someone asked if we also portrayed female perpetrators. After checking the fan page, this individual was made aware that our campaign demonstrates that both men and women can be perpetrators of sexual harassment.



- 2) We also received some comments regarding the scope of the sexual harassment addressed in our campaign. Both comments presented below were written by men: one of them (Michał) understands sexual harassment only as physical acts while the second one asks both about female perpetrators and non-physical forms of sexual harassment.

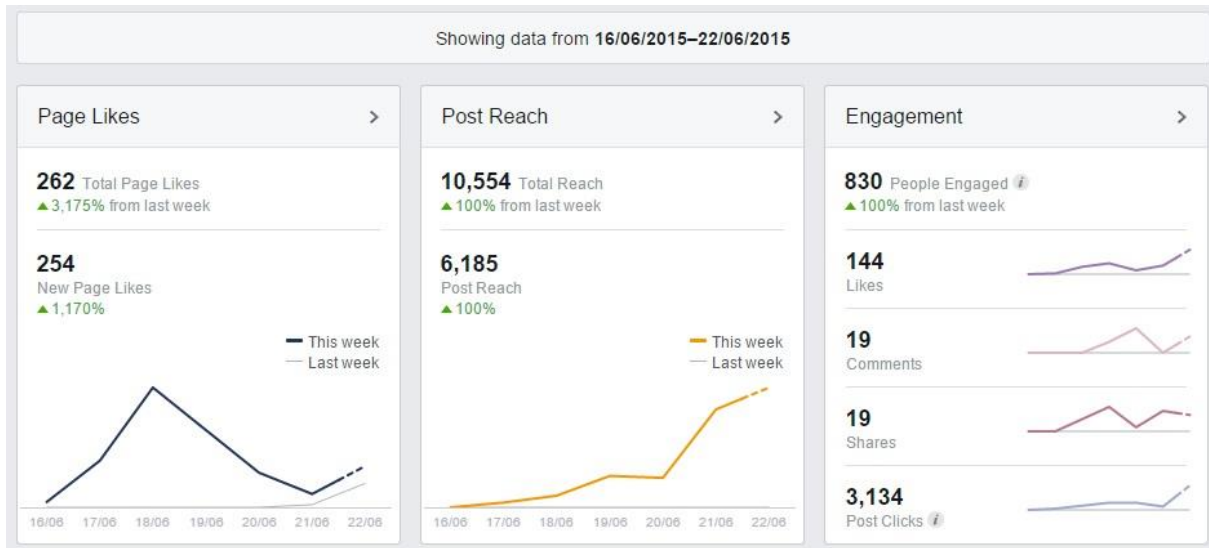


Results as of August 10th 2015

Likes: 282

Total post outreach: over 10,500

Below the data from the week of launching the campaign:



Continuation of the Campaign

Moving forward, our hope is that the “Take It Off The Agenda” fan page will act as a platform for young people to share their experiences with, as well as strategies to combat, sexual harassment in the workplace. While our team does not intend to develop more original content, we will post relevant articles, events and images on this page from time to time. Furthermore, our website, with our campaign graphics and videos as well as information about other sexual harassment support organizations and campaigns, will remain live. Thus far, we have contacted four university career centers about our work, and expect that this may be a good way to promote the use of our website as an educational tool.

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