

*No Tabu: Discussing Safe Sex for Teens in an Interactive Zine*

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## **Section 1: Identifying the Issue**

Globally, Poland is not known for a friendly attitude toward LGBTQ+ rights. In fact, 96% of the population identifies as Catholic (or are born Catholic), a religion that indoctrinates the Bible in ways that often frown upon sodomy, sex, and gay people. Additionally, the Catholic Church is working to seize more power in Poland, pushing a more religious agenda on the new democracy that works against LGBTQ+ rights in favor of heteronormativity and cis-gender norms.

Regardless of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, however, there is still a thriving queer community in Poland, and general public attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people are improving. Gdansk, for example, held its first Gay Rights March in 2015; Warsaw's equality parade, Parada Równości, netted 50,000 participants—the largest turnout ever in Poland.

Additionally, Polish non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been working to support queer youth. Some notable organizations include Mamygłos, Grupa Ponton, Campaign Against Homophobia (KPH), and the Equality Foundation. The most pressing questions for queer youth, and all youth in general, however, are about safe sex. With little to no sex education in Polish public schools, both queer and heterosexual youth alike are left to discover sexuality on their own; still, the national age of consent is only 15 years old. As activists in organizations working on LGBT equality, we know that the issue of sexual education for queer teens is invisible in public and education discourse alike. Moreover, the sexual education at schools is almost absent in both Poland and Ukraine. Instead of workshops on the practical aspect of how to make sex safer using contraceptives, everything pupils get are lectures on how horrific sexual transmission diseases are. We decided that Polish youth, especially queer youth, need a quick and friendly resource to learn about sexually transmitted infections, barrier methods, consent, and fun, safe, enjoyable sex.

## **Section 2: Our Solution**

This resource took form in an interactive zine about safe sex for LGBTQ+ teens, which we initially called “Sex Misja 2” after a famous Polish film. We created this zine through extensive research on safe sex materials, consent and legal rights of assault survivors in Poland, HIV testing centers, and other interactive zines. We consulted reputable sources in English and Polish alike, including Planned Parenthood, Advocates for Youth, Grupa Ponton, and the Human Rights Campaign. With information on contraceptives and STIs stemming from Planned Parenthood and resources about HIV sourced from Advocates for Youth, we created a thorough textual overview of sexuality. However, since we were creating a zine, we did not want to overload the content with too much text because we wanted to make information easy to understand and easily accessible—which is extremely important for our audience (LGBTQ+ teens and youth ages 15-20).

In addition to pictures and illustrations, we compiled a list of LGBT organizations, gay-friendly HIV test centers, places where LGBT teens can find a psychological help, groups of support, community centers, and other resources throughout our zine. We included map of Poland featuring all optional places where teens can take HIV test anonymously and free of charge; a list of resources in an appendix; and a page devoted to the Grupa Ponton hotline which teens can call to anonymously ask questions or request the information on issues they are confused about: issues about sexuality that are not talked about either at schools or at home.

Most of the information regarding safe sex and consent on Internet is available exclusively in English, but not all of the Polish population speaks or can read English, so we decided that creating a handbook in Polish would be the best option for accessibility and outreach. Much of the work, then, fell on Agnieszka, our group’s only native Polish speaker. While Erika and Yaromyr compiled information in English, Agnieszka translated the entire text into Polish.

After we completed our zine, we changed the name of our campaign from “Sex Mission” to “No Tabu: Rainbow Edition.” Although we wanted our zine’s title to be funny and catchy, we realized that the name “sex mission” would likely provoke intense controversy—more so than the idea of queer sex itself. Thus, we settled on “No Tabu” highlighting that sexuality education is something natural, not shameful, and must be addressed openly. Rainbow Edition is a small hint that our target audience is LGBTQ+ teens, even though most of our information and visuals can be helpful for a wider audience.

We can say that the textual part of the handbook is enticing since it includes quiz as well as sixteen pages of visual aids covering topics of consent (for instance, a visual with traffic lights as a metaphor for consent), contraceptives (for instance, very uncommon but important contraceptive like dental dams), condoms, a hotline for LGBTQ+ teens, as well as a map with contacts and locations of HIV testing centers across Poland. After creating our handbook, however, we had to disseminate our information.

### **Section 3: The Implementation Phase**

**The** implementation phase took us approximately two weeks: 10 days to complete the biggest portion of visuals and information, find possible channels of distribution, and, finally, launch our equally important Facebook “Like” page full of posts, videos, photos and information about safe sex. Possibly, if we had had one week more, we could have done publishing of at least 30 sample zines and could have arranged meetings with prospective distributors.

At the same time, Marianna Hała, a creative volunteer and artist from [Uniwersytet Artystyczny w Poznaniu](#), created several GIFs that brought our book to life—including photos on consent, lube, and a hotline. Moreover, she created our campaign’s logo. This seemingly simple part of the campaign took a lot of time and energy as a logo is the visual that target audience sees first, and can either entice someone to read our zine and “like” our Facebook page, or to avoid both.

#### **Section 4: Results and Conclusions**

As of June 20th, 2017, we have gathered 130 likes on our Facebook page and 140 followers. Our posts reached 1,300 people in total, with one post reaching 693 people. We posted on our page 7 times. These posts consist of the aforementioned GIFs as well as pictures and videos on consent. On the presentation day we published our first (Polish version) handbook with all the information and illustrations. We could have reached more people by using a “Facebook ads boost feature” but we decided to save our campaign budget for further publishing so it could be distributed more widely to teens and young adults.

With the help of our partners like MamyGlos and Grupa Ponton, we are going to distribute it through many lines. Other organizations, including LGBT organizations might also help us in sharing it. We plan to distribute it as a “zine,” making it not only trendy but also providing more acceptances for our informative handbook.

Due to our time restraints, we decided to eliminate some activities. We realized that a week is not enough time to write a book in two languages and translate it. During the process, it turned out that Erika also had to scan and edit every page on her laptop, utilizing a Microsoft Paint program. If we had had another week, we would have had more illustrations, more activities, and cleaner graphics. But given the time pressure, we are happy with the final outcome.

The same situation applies to our content. The feedback we received indicated more topics but considering the extensive research and writing associated with each and every topic, this information is both non-exhaustive and somewhat grueling to obtain, rewrite, and paraphrase in such a short time. This has, however, been an incredibly valuable learning experience for testing the limits of our abilities and learning more about safe sex ourselves. We hope to use some of the campaign strategies we have learned in our future Humanity in Action requirements: most notably, our future Action Projects.

**Resources:**

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/>

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/for-professionals/sex-education-resource-center>

<https://kph.org.pl/>

<https://euobserver.com/lgbti/138392>

<https://thedoschool.org/ventures/mamyglos/>

<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2005/51573.htm>

<https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/06/25/417446107/for-polands-gay-community-a-shift-in-public-attitudes-if-not-laws>