

Nie ma zgody dla tej mowy / No Consent to Hate Speech

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INTRODUCTION

The social-media campaign “Nie ma zgody dla tej mowy” aims to raise awareness and combat online hate speech towards women. The target group includes active Internet users in Poland ages 16 to 35. The specific goals of the campaign are the following:

- raise awareness about the proliferation of hate speech towards women online;
- counteract the lack of research and statistics regarding hate speech towards women in Poland;
- map the existing hate speech online that is directed towards women to demonstrate the urgency and scale of the issue;
- initiate discussions and debate about hate speech towards women online;
- educate the public about what hate speech is and the effects of hate speech at the individual, group, and social level;
- provide alternative responses for users experiencing hate speech;
- show how one can respond and intervene in instances of sexist hate speech online.



RESEARCH

As defined by the Council of Europe, hate speech covers all forms of expression that spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.¹ Despite the significance of standardizing this definition across Europe, there still remains a lack of research and understanding of gender-based hate speech online. This lack of information on gender-based hate speech also exists in Poland. While reports such as “Hate Speech in Poland 2014 Summary of the National Opinion Poll” by Michał Bilewicz, Marta

¹ [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/media/doc/cm/rec\(1997\)020&expmem_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/media/doc/cm/rec(1997)020&expmem_EN.asp)

Marchlewska, Wiktor Soral, and Mikołaj Winiewski outlined substantial findings on both the proliferation and acceptance of hate speech, “women” as a study group were excluded.

Since 2010, “Wiedza Lokalna” Foundation has led the project “Raportmniejszosci.pl,” which is a system for monitoring the Polish Internet for hate speech and the language of hostility. The first monitoring project covered three online forum platforms that functioned in the framework of the largest Polish portals (gazeta.pl, onet.pl, wp.pl). The author’s methodology for monitoring the comments posted on the Internet included (1) developing tools for the identification and selection of hateful content and (2) selecting any comments expressing a negative attitude towards minorities or individuals representing those minorities. The program searched Internet forums for the language of hostility and hate speech against four groups: national, ethnic, religious and sexual. Once again, the category of women was excluded.²

When reviewing different hate speech definitions available on Polish websites we found that the category of women was also excluded. For example, on the mowanienawisci.info there are various definitions collected, yet none of them use “women” as a category. In addition, the Polish legal definition of hate speech can be found in Article 257 of the Criminal Code: “Whoever publicly insults a group of people or a particular person because of her/his national, ethnic, racial, religious affiliation or because of her/his lack of religious beliefs, or for such reasons infringes the inviolability of another person shall be punished by imprisonment of up to three years. (Law of 6th June 1997. - Criminal Code. Dz. U. 1997 No. 88, item. 553).³

Only two definitions found in Polish scientific descriptions include the category of gender (płeć): “Hate Speech in Light of the Theory of Discourse” (Lech, Nijakowski, 2008) and “Problems of discrimination against persons belonging to national minorities and ethnic minorities in Poland (state policy, legislation and social attitudes)” (Chancellery of Parliament, the Office of Research, Department of Economic and Social Analyses, Sławomir Łobodziński, 2003).⁴ The necessity of collecting specific data and statistics on gender-based hate speech in Poland should be prioritized alongside race, nationality, religion, and ethnicity of people. While women have gained significant rights in Polish society, violence towards women still exists online and offline.

Extensive research demonstrates the severe effect of hate speech online; hate speech has been linked to the escalation of negative attitudes and discriminatory behaviors towards minority groups. The verbal promotion of prejudice can impact the psychological, emotional, and physical

² Chustecka, Magdalena, *Słowa nie są niewinne, czyli monitoring polskiego internetu pod kątem mowy nienawiści i języka wrogość*, 14 Mar. 2013, 21st June 2015. <http://archiwum.watchdogportal.pl/4,733,slowa_nie_sa_niewinne_czyli_monitoring_polskiego_internetu_pod_katem_mowy_nienawisci_i_jezyka_wrogosci.html>

³ As above, page 2-3.

⁴ Włodarczyk, Joanna, *Hate Speech on the Internet in experience Polish youth*, Fundacja Dzieci Niczyje, 22nd June 2015, p.2. <<http://www.mowanienawisci.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Mowa-nienawi%C5%9Bci-w-internecie-w-do%C5%9Bwiadczeniu-polskiej-m%C5%82odzie%C5%BCy.pdf>>

health of a person belonging to a group.⁵ Research has also demonstrated hate speech's capacity to contribute to social exclusion, anxiety, and loss of dignity. According to "Hate Speech and Hate Crime" by The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud's Report of 2015⁶, hate speech "has a deterrent effect on participation in our democratic system, in other words, members of the targeted groups avoid speaking when they can expect to be dehumanized and harassed." According to a report by the Feminoteka Foundation, gender-based cyberbullying towards women through such mechanisms as hate speech "preserves gender hierarchy in the cyberspace" and "reinforces male domination by eliminating or silencing women's voices on the Internet."⁷ It also "deprives women/girls of control over their lives – online and offline; decreases women's/girls' chances of achieving educational and professional goals; forces women to adopt male identities online; limits their autonomy, ways of communication, self-expression and violating their dignity; and violates women's/girls' dignity and influences their conviction on being equal to men." These negative impacts on women's physical health and emotional state demonstrate the urgency of this issue. Given the lack of meaningful engagement or governmental concern for this problem, we believe using a social media campaign to raise awareness is one effective way to instigate change.

A 2013 report on online hate speech published by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and Jan Moolman demonstrates the need to prioritize combating gender-based violence online as well. The report uses the term "technology-related forms of violence against women or VAW." VAW is defined as "violence against women that is committed, abetted or aggravated through the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and in online spaces, are part of this continuum of violence."⁸ Not only do they claim that this form of violence reinforces structural gender inequality, but they also explain how it perpetuates sexism and misogyny. The Association for Progressive Communications outlines the direct link between online hate speech towards women and violence offline. The report states: "Cyber stalking, online harassment, image manipulation and privacy violations have increasingly become part of intimate partner violence and sexual harassment. This compromises women's and girls' safety online and offline and causes psychological and emotional harm, reinforces prejudice, damages reputation, causes economic loss, and poses barriers to participation in public life." According to their findings, "Of the 470 technology-related violations reported via the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) mapping platform, the majority related to

⁵ Branka, Maja, and Cieřlikowska, Dominika, ed. *Edukacja antydyskryminacyjna. Podręcznik trenerski*, Kraków: Villa Decius, 2010, p. 102.

⁶ *Hate Speech and Hate Crime*, Norway's Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud's Report, 2015, p. 15

⁷ Dryjańska, Anna, and Dzierzgowska, Anna, and Piotrowska, Joanna, and Rutkowska, Ewa, and Sosińska, Agnieszka. *Teacher's Manual 'Staying Safe On-line: Gender and Safety on the Internet'*. Warsaw: Feminoteka Foundation, 2014.

⁸ Moolman, Jan, *Violence against women online*, in: Global Information Society Watch 2013, Women's rights, gender and ICTs, 2013, 18th June 2015. <<http://www.giswatch.org/en/womens-rights-gender/need-prioritise-violence-against-women-online>>

repeated harassment (100) followed by threats of violence and blackmail (58) and abusive comments (43). APC's recent global monitoring survey on sexual rights and the internet bears this out as it showed that while 98% of sexual rights activists see the Internet as critical for their work, 51% of them have received violent and threatening messages."

While some social media companies such as Facebook have set "Community Standards" which take down "posts or photos that attack a person based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or medical condition," many reports of sexist or misogynist comments are declared to be acceptable and are seen as not being in violation of these standards. "Nie ma zgody dla tej mowy" sees these systems of reporting as ineffective. We believe freedom of speech ends when it violates another person's human right to safety. While reporting instances of hate speech to companies is still a worthy step in combating online hate, this campaign is initiated from the conviction that more action is needed from internet users to expose the enormity of violent comments. The freedoms and opportunities provided online should be available to all. We believe more effective complaint mechanisms and laws governing hate speech online should go into effect in Poland. Attention to the marginalization of women online needs to be a priority when fighting for human rights online.

OUTLINE OF SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

To address this issue, our social campaign, "Nie ma zgody dla tej mowy" aims to provoke discussion about online hate speech towards women by launching social media efforts in the form of video and graphic series primarily on Facebook. After researching the existing issue in Poland, we decided to collect examples of hate speech found online in a variety of sites to show the scope of the issue. By taking screenshots of comments, posts, articles, or online groups containing hate speech, we created a database of evidence. Our campaign aims to catalyze debate and discussion through provocation; we believe in order to insight people to care about this issue we need to take drastic action to catch public attention. We therefore took examples of sexist and misogynist comments from online into the center of Warsaw by staging a performance. This performance aimed to track how people respond when the hate speech that is often seen silently online is spoken out loud in a public space. Using a megaphone, we sought out a central location in Warsaw and screamed these examples of hate speech. After speaking these examples out loud we explained the purpose of the campaign. To our surprise, the response of the public was neutral and indifferent. The majority of people walked past without paying attention to our happening. Through this performance we became more aware of the normalization of this issue.



According to the journalist Laurie Penny, "The idea that this sort of hate speech is at all normal needs to end now. The Internet is

public space, real space; it's increasingly where we interact socially, do our work, organize our lives and engage with politics, and violence online is real violence. The hatred of women in public spaces online is reaching epidemic levels and it's time to end the pretense that it's either acceptable or inevitable."⁹ Since we anticipated some reaction from the public, this unexpected result helped direct our campaign in a more provocative direction; we seek to provoke and bring

this hate speech (silently and violently taking over the Internet) into a more public forum.

Our next step involved creating bold, colorful graphics that would spread throughout the web. The graphics feature texts of the very instances of hate speech found online in Poland. At the bottom of each graphic we explained the purpose of reappropriating this speech. The graphic stated: "Surprised to see this here? You can find it online everyday. Stop hate speech online." By bringing these instances of hate speech that are ignored or go unreported back to the public attention, we hope to recontextualize the words to demonstrate the absurdity and violence of the hate speech that goes unreported each day.

We created a Facebook page that each day presented information on hate speech through articles,

reports, and other resources. By providing a forum for active Internet users to express their stories about being victims of hate speech we want to provide a site of empowerment, education, and solidarity. By breaking the silence around this issue, we hope to encourage the public to report and respond to instances of hate speech. We want to show to perpetrators that what they are saying online is a form of violence and is unacceptable.

We understand that responding to each and every instance of hate speech towards women online is a large task, especially when you are the victim. Therefore, we also plan to write up potential responses for users to cut and paste into comment threads when they come across sexist or misogynist speech. This resource displaces the responsibility of eliminating the issue from the victims of hate speech online by providing everyday Internet users a fast and effective way to speak out against this violence. We seek to change the sexist culture permeating the web that deems hate speech towards women somehow acceptable and normal. The anonymity of the online sphere also means that there is little accountability for perpetrators of hate speech. Yet, with the voices of many combating this issue, and each of us playing our part, we believe we can change the violent, discriminatory virtual sphere that silences so many in our communities.



⁹ Penny, Laurie, "Laurie Penny on web misogyny: It's time to end the culture of online misogyny", *New Statesman*, 27th Jan 2013, 20th June 2015. <<http://www.newstatesman.com/laurie-penny/2013/01/laurie-penny-its-time-end-culture-online-misogyny>>

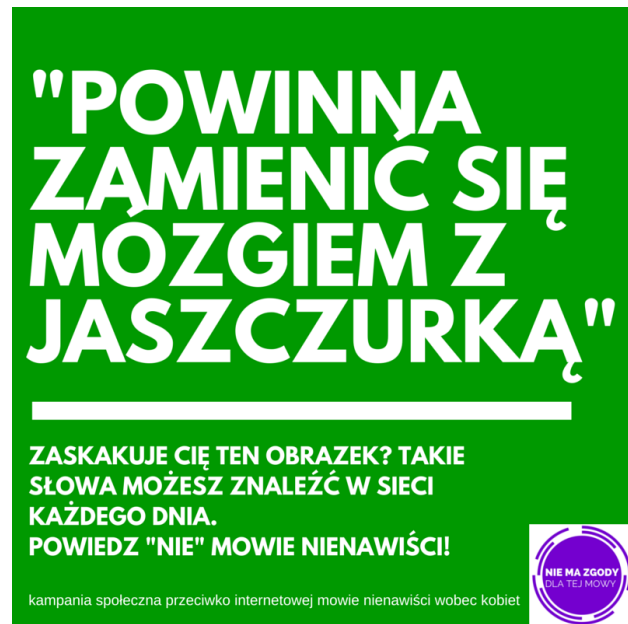
Our second video focuses on interviews we conducted throughout Warsaw about hate speech towards women online. In the interviews we asked participants to read examples of hate speech out loud. Afterwards, we asked how saying these words out loud made them feel. We then inquired as to whether or not they had encountered hate speech online, and if/how they respond. The answers were varied, but the overwhelming majority shared their frustration with the proliferation of hate speech towards women online. They explained how much of an issue it remains.

Through these videos, graphics, and resources distributed through Facebook and Twitter, we aim to spark a conversation about this issue between online users. We also want to provide a forum for women experiencing hate speech to find solidarity. Finally, this campaign works to create a culture where hate speech towards women is no longer tolerated off and online.

We have been inspired by many innovative, international projects to combat hate speech. These include the No Hate Speech Movement in Europe, the Lithuanian “Experience”, and Feminoteka’s “Słowa też gwałcą” as well as the hashtags #everydaysexism, #yesallwomen, and #fbrape. Additionally, we learned from a feminist campaign against hate speech launched in 2013 that demanded that Facebook ban gender-based hate speech online and set more concrete community standards for online.

CAMPAIGN IMPLEMENTATION AND FEEDBACK FROM USERS

We received positive feedback on our approach from training teams and HIA fellows. For instance, many felt that bringing these provocative statements out from comment threads or online groups was the most effective way to spark serious debate about this issue. We received feedback about the controversial implementation of graphics during this campaign. One social media user wrote to us explaining that while on the one hand he supports our initiative very much, on the other hand he is concerned about the form of our graphics. By duplicating hateful texts with capital letters - even in condemnation - we could unintentionally strengthen their presence. Those who are against hate speech will feel mobilized, but the groups who write such texts will just have another opportunity to laugh. There are also people whom these texts could potentially upset, especially victims who have experienced this type of violence online. He suggested that we not only focus on the graphics but also provide knowledge about (1) what specifically can be done against hate speech (2) what impact hate speech has on women, and (3) how the social norm that permits or not on sexism is created. We consequently worked to



diversify the content that we distributed online via Facebook so that the graphics would not become the sole presence of the campaign.

Thanks to this participant's suggestions, we were able to respond more effectively to the issue. We answered him with a message fully describing our goals and mission. We explained how we had had similar doubts and spent significant time discussing the form of our actions. The use of such graphics was a type of provocation through which we can alert social media users to the issue.

Another participant of the HIA fellowship noted that he believed the most effective way to respond to hate speech was to avoid "feeding the trolls." In other words, it was better not to respond or give attention to instances of hate speech since it could potentially antagonize the perpetrator. We decided as a team to disagree with this approach believing that silence to these comments has gone on for too long. A bystander's silence to injustice is a form of consent, and we think that these instances of hate speech should be responded to promptly when it is safe to do so. That is why we decided to draft a series of potential responses participants could use to address perpetrators of hate speech in a safe and concise way. While we understand that this is not always a possibility, we want the campaign page to be a space where Internet users who are tired of experiencing hate speech can find agency in the fight to end violence online.

LESSONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe that bringing these instances of hate speech offline into the public sphere was an innovative way to develop a social campaign. While we have each personally experienced hate speech online, saying these phrases out loud was a very intense and thought-provoking experience. We each shared how the performance impacted us on a personal level and reminded us of how important combating this issue is. We believe feeling a personal investment in any social campaign is critical. We also think that collecting the opinions of participants and basing the direction of the campaign on their own experiences also remains an important step in any social campaign. It is essential to understand the issue before attempting to find solutions.

Using the tactic of provocation ended up being a strong campaign strategy to bring attention to an issue that many would rather ignore. We were able to use the controversial phrases as a means to draw attention to the issue and encourage Internet users to consider their role in solving this issue.

MOVING FORWARD

Given that one of the campaign's goals was to raise awareness of existing of hate speech towards women online in Poland, we hope that our actions will bring individual and public attention to this problem and initiate discussions on it. We hope that in the long run the lack of research and statistics on hate speech towards women online will no longer exist and statistics on hate speech towards women online in Poland will be available to illustrate the degree of the problem. We hope that in the future the problem of hate speech towards women online will be no longer ignored in Poland.

Secondly, by providing alternative responses for users experiencing hate speech online, we aim to equip social media users with concrete and ready answers to hate speech so they can react fast and directly. Alongside this resource, we would like to also provide information on how one can combat hate speech in more general way through articles, reports, and building off of models used by other international campaign strategies. We would thereby strengthen users' power by providing knowledge both about the problem and methods of counteracting.

Finally, we also want to regularly encourage users to send or post instances when they have experienced hate speech. One of our goals includes encouraging users to comment on the campaign's graphics and write what they think about them. We would like to provide a platform for continued engagement for online users (for instance, users can send examples using the Twitter hashtag #NieMaZgody or #NoConsentToHate).

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