

SPEAKING OUT AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND COMMUNICATING FOR CARE IN POLAND



Levke Burfeind, Michalina Ferencz, and Andy Post

Issue Overview:

The issue of sexual violence in Poland is both drastic and complex: according to Ster foundation, 22% of Polish women have experienced rape.¹ Yet the problem goes beyond appalling frequency of sexual violence and into our understanding of what qualifies as “rape.” These Ster Foundation statistic was compiled using a ‘Western’ feminist conception of rape, involving any situation where the victim was forced into sexual activity against their will. Yet the traditional notion of rape is a violent attack in a dark alley, committed by a deranged criminal. Many would reject the statistic that every fifth Polish woman experiences rape because they are unaware of how sexual violence manifests itself in familiar ways. 92% of rape victims in Poland knew their assaulter. 20% of sexual assaults occur in the home.² The everydayness of sexual violence—the fact that perpetrators may not know they are perpetrators and the assaulters not delinquent strangers—contributes to the complexity of the issue.

Another layer that contributes to sexual violence is the lack of any comprehensive sexual education. The only required sex education in Polish public schools is “Preparation for Family Life,” an ambiguous curriculum that is technically required by the Polish government but many schools do not allot time, resources, or trained teachers for the classes. According to Senior Fellows Susanne Heuck and Jessica Mowles, “over the course of our research, it seemed that the overwhelming majority of Family Life classes focused on preparing students for marriage and family life, rather than providing information on sexual health and reproductive matters.”³ Mowles and Heuck discuss how the many mainstream politicians—including those from the current majoritarian PiS party (Law and Justice)—oppose any form of sexual education in schools. Artur Górski argued the following:

“Currently there is practically no sex education in schools and I don’t think that there is any need to bring it into them. There is a big danger that according to current tendencies and modern fashion such education would lead to unnecessary sex promotion and even some sexual degeneration,” he claims.⁴

¹ Betlejewski, Rafał “Rzeczywista skala przemocy seksualnej w Polsce – szokujące dane!” Fundacja Ster. 12.17.2015. <http://mediumpubliczne.pl/2015/12/rzeczywista-skala-przemocy-seksualnej-w-polsce-szokujace-dane/>

² *Ibid.*

³ Hueck, Susanne, Mowles Jessica. “Love Your Neighbor, But Not Too Much: Politician and Religious Involvement with Polish Public Schools” Humanity in Action. 2014. <http://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/214-love-your-neighbor-but-not-too-much-political-and-religious-involvement-in-sex-education-within-polish-public-schools>

⁴ *Ibid.*

This dominant attitude against *any* discussion of sexual and gender equality has gone as far to form a discourse against “gender ideology” — a derogatory term that is used to degrade any political discussion of sexual violence, LGBTQ rights, women’s rights, and more.

On the topic of sexual violence we are presented with a toxic combination of a ruling party that believes all sex education should occur in the household, and a statistical reality that sexual violence frequently occurs amongst familiar people and places—such as the household. How do we break this chain of violence, and misinformation that then perpetuates violence once more?

II. Campaign Design:

Given the multifaceted reality of sexual violence in Poland, our campaign morphed through many versions before arriving at our final design. Initial priorities were to address issues sexual violence in a manner that is accessible to men as well as women. We wanted to ensure those that are in greatest risk of becoming perpetrators of sexual violence would not be left out of the discussion. However, addressing a campaign exclusively to men became a challenge—many ideas were at risk of putting our target audience immediately in a position of defense and denial. We also wanted to make sure to make our campaign simple enough to be immediately understood. Through consultation with people outside the campaign such as Marek Dorobisz some ideas were discarded as they were too coded. For example, #riphescript was an early version of our campaign that would have encouraged anybody engaging in sexual activity to abandon the script of unspoken sexual contact initiated by the male. Along with sexual communication, we had many other desired subjects for our campaign: victim blaming, lack of knowledge about the frequency of rape in Poland, etc.

Eventually we arrived at our final product: #NoUnsexyQuestions. The concept is to share simple videos of peers talking about formative experiences of learning or communicating about sex: “Peer to peer. Friend to Friend. Let’s break the taboo.” The name of the campaign is meant to address the issue directly: there are no unsexy questions, therefore all forms of communication about sex whether it is consent, sexual preferences or personal boundaries. If Polish institutions refuse to provide necessary education about consent and sexual safety, we wanted to galvanize the most powerful source of sexual information: peers and first-hand experiences. Therefore, our campaign is targeted at 18-25 year olds, in the hopes that our shared dialogue would be a positive inspiration to break the taboo around direct sexual communication.

Along with the #NoUnsexyQuestions videos, we wanted to give our target audience context for why communicating about sex is so important: it combats the culture of silence and sexual imposition that perpetuates rape. Knowing the statistics and realities of sexual assault in Poland might allow our target audience to have a more nuanced knowledge of the issue. Therefore another feature of our campaign was to design a series of “juxtaposition” posters. The intent was to inform by putting people just outside their comfort zone.

We employed a similar strategy to address the problem of victim blaming. Victim blaming is the phenomenon of people reacting skeptically to survivors of sexual assault, wondering if their appearance, presentation, or clothing may have contributed to their assault. We placed items that are often blamed for attracting sexual attention (high heels and dresses) on inanimate objects to

show the absurdity of many forms of victim blaming. With both of our graphic elements the intention was to shock, inform, and inspire reflection on the assumptions that often surround our collective imaginations of rape that are inaccurate.

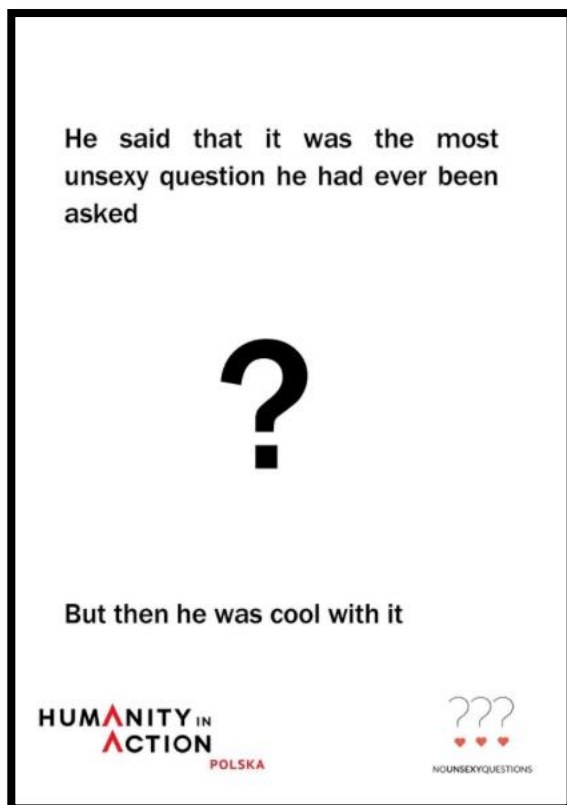


III. Campaign Implementation:

Our campaign was designed in a step by step process that would build anticipation for the focus content: the #NoUnsexyQuestions videos. To do so, we scheduled catchy preview graphics that would offer an enticing view into the forthcoming lessons about sexual communication.

Along with our own content, we wanted to include inspiring materials from other sexual education campaigns that would support the message of our campaign. For example, videos that explain consent with simple metaphors such as offering someone a [cup of tea](#) or [ordering a pizza](#)⁵ that encourage the notion that sex and sexual preference is a communicated and dynamic action. Ordering a pizza, for example requires discussion, and compromise: it's a combined effort rather than the usual metaphors—such as baseball—that describe sex and encourage competition and completion rather than enjoyment.

We scheduled our posts so there was one #NoUnsexyQuestions video, one juxtaposition graphic and one poster against victim blaming each day. Additionally, we produced the videos with basic equipment and minimal editing in hopes that our followers would be encouraged to post their own experiences of learning and communicating about sex.



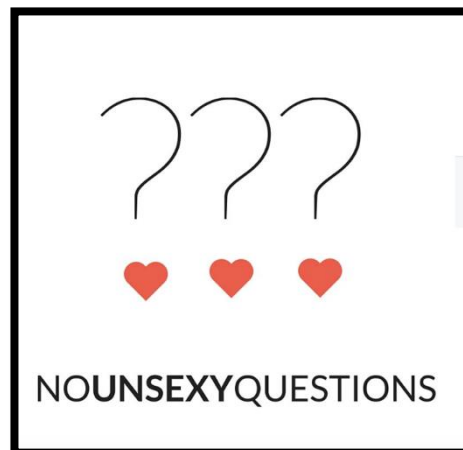
⁵ Vernacchio, Al. "Sex Needs a New Metaphor. Here's one." Ted Talks. 2012. http://www.ted.com/talks/al_vernacchio_sex_needs_a_new_metaphor_here_s_one

IV. Reflections & Future Ideas

Quantitatively we had the highest feedback from the videos, with over 250 views and some personal comments. One such comment was in response to a video where the “unsexy” question was a woman asking for an HIV test from her partner before having sex. The comment was that the campaign should emphasize that men need to be initiators of such questions about sexual safety as well. This type of introspection, especially from the male perspective, was encouraging coming from the target audience.

However, our campaign did face difficulties with reaching a wider audience (as of three days into our campaign, we had 121 “Likes” on our page). Future ideas for reaching a further audience may be contacting friends in another medium besides Facebook and telling them to view our page or contacting other well-known websites that focus on woman’s rights and/or sexual education to have them share #NoUnexyQuestions. While none of us were particularly experienced with running social media campaigns before this attempt, paying closer attention to *when* we post our content (so that there is a greater online presence) may be helpful.

One final—and central—subject of reflection is the medium of our campaign. We chose to focus all of our efforts on the online campaign through the Facebook page. Our reasoning for this was to reach a wider audience, and potentially have a trickle effect where the page would be shared and seen by people outside of our already-established social circles. Conducting some offline activity, such as video recordings on the street, or hanging posters around Warsaw or outside communities would potentially yield more tangible feedback and results in the future.



Appendix I: “Juxtaposition” statistics—

WHAT ARE YOUR ODDS?

TO BECOME A PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE? LESS THAN 0.01%
TO BECOME A VICTIM OF RAPE? MORE THAN 20%
EVERY FIFTH WOMAN EXPERIENCES RAPE IN POLAND.

© 2014 QUEST

ONA TEZ CHCIAŁA.

TO NIE MOCNY MAKIJAZ GWALCI -
TO GWALCIEL.

DOSC OBWINIANIA OFIAR.

© 2014 QUEST

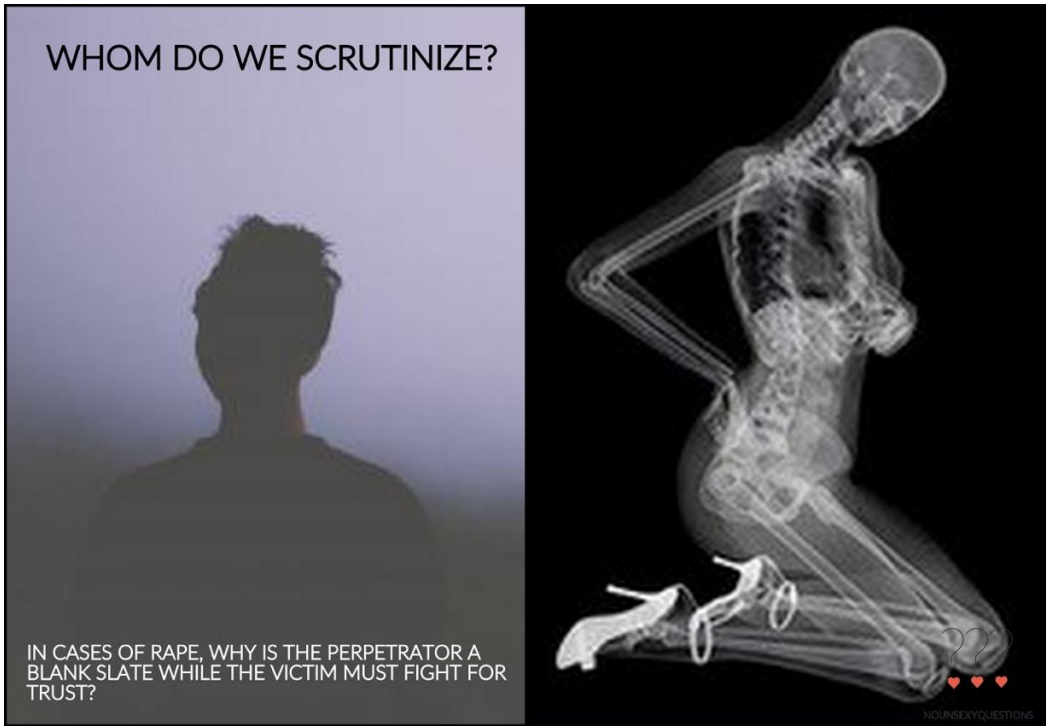


SHE WAS "ASKING" FOR IT...

SHOES DON'T RAPE. RAPISTS DO. STOP VICTIM BLAMING.



NOUNSEXYQUESTIONS



WHOM DO WE SCRUTINIZE?

IN CASES OF RAPE, WHY IS THE PERPETRATOR A BLANK SLATE WHILE THE VICTIM MUST FIGHT FOR TRUST?



NOUNSEXYQUESTIONS

Bibliography:

Betlejewski, Rafał “Rzeczywista skala przemocy seksualnej w Polsce – szokujące dane!” Fundacja Ster. 12.17.2015. <http://mediumpubliczne.pl/2015/12/rzeczywista-skala-przemocy-seksualnej-w-polsce-szokujace-dane/>

Hueck, Susanne, Mowles Jessica. “Love Your Neighbor, But Not Too Much: Political and Religious Involvement with Polish Public Schools” Humanity in Action. 2014. www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/214-love-your-neighbor-but-not-too-much-political-and-religious-involvement-in-sex-education-within-polish-public-schools

Vernacchio, Al. “Sex Needs a New Metaphor. Here’s one.” Ted Talks. 2012. http://www.ted.com/talks/al_vernacchio_sex_needs_a_new_metaphor_here_s_one