

## The Polish profeminist movement

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2012

<https://doi.org/10.25595/2595>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version  
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Wojnicka, Katarzyna: *The Polish profeminist movement*, in: *Gender : Zeitschrift für Geschlecht, Kultur und Gesellschaft*, Jg. 4 (2012) Nr. 3, 25–40. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25595/2595>.

## The Polish profeminist movement

### Zusammenfassung

Die profeministische Bewegung in Polen

Der Artikel beschäftigt sich mit einem Thema, das von der zeitgenössischen Soziologie unter „Soziale Bewegungen von Männern“ gefasst wird. Es handelt sich um neue Bewegungen, die sich vor allem dadurch auszeichnen, dass die Akteure das Themenfeld der Geschlechtergerechtigkeit als ein wesentliches Kriterium zur Bildung einer gemeinschaftlichen Identität betrachten. Sie umfassen nicht nur die Bewegungen für die Rechte von Männern und Vätern, sondern ebenso die mythopoetische, die männlich-religiöse und die profeministische Bewegung. Vorge stellt wird die profeministische Bewegung in Polen, weil deren Aktivist:innen bisher weitgehend unbeachtet geblieben sind und ihre Arbeit im Kampf für Geschlechtergerechtigkeit im Vergleich zum Engagement von Frauen in Polen eine stärkere Marginalisierung erfahren hat.

#### *Schlüsselwörter*

Soziale Bewegungen, Profeminismus, Männer, Gleichberechtigung der Geschlechter, Männlichkeit, Polen

### Summary

In my article I explore an issue which is part of the phenomena termed “men’s social movements”. Men’s social movements are new social movements in which actors focus on gender issues as the main criteria for building collective identity. They include the men’s and fathers’ rights movement, the mythopoetic movement, male religious movements and the profeminist movement. In my article I present the case of the Polish profeminist movement because its actors seem to be relatively unrecognized as yet and their activities are rather marginalized compared to female activists fighting for gender equality in Poland.

#### *Keywords*

social movements, profeminism, men, gender equality, critical studies on men and masculinities, Poland

## 1 Introduction

The profeminist movement belongs to the wider group of men’s social movements, which can be described as the third stage of gender movements, the social phenomena which arose in America, Australia, Western Europe and Scandinavia in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They emerged in response to or as a consequence of the rise of feminist and gay and lesbian movements. Men’s movements are also associated with the “masculinity crisis”, and attempts to resolve it which have been undertaken (not for the first time) in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Michael Flood (1998):

“The men’s movement is a contradictory phenomenon, involving both the defence of men’s privilege and efforts to undo it. It incorporated diverse strands – men’s liberationists, profeminists, spiritual or

mythopoetic, and men's rights and father's rights – with differing agendas, emphases and understandings. While personal growth and therapy have been important focuses, increasingly these are being complemented by public political activism" (Flood 1998: 68).

The earliest, most developed and meaningful phenomenon among men's movements was the profeminist movement. Its actors have been supporters of a gender equality cause as well as female activists since the very beginning of the so-called "women's issue". Moreover, the first contemporary<sup>1</sup> profeminists were descended from groups created by women. They were often in close, intimate relationships with feminists, which had a relevant influence on creating their profeminist approach<sup>2</sup>. According to Kenneth Clatterbaugh (1997):

"Deeply affected by the ideas of feminism, [these actors] met in order to discuss the impact of feminism on their lives. Many of these men came to this interest in feminism through the direct influence of women with whom they were intimate. They all conceded that American society is sexist, that women are discriminated against and dominated by men, and that women are objectified sexually and excluded from many, if not most, areas of power that are open to men" (Clatterbaugh 1997: 41).

At the beginning, contemporary male advocates of gender equality started to create small "anti-sexists" groups, which mostly focused on supporting feminists in certain types of activism. Profeminist activity chiefly manifested in supporting feminist actions such as marches, demonstrations, pickets, riots, conferences etc; participating in female "consciousness-raising" groups, which over the time turned into separate "male consciousness-raising groups" meetings; supporting certain initiatives and lobbyist practices regarding legislative changes (e.g. the Equal Rights Amendment – ERA); publishing and academic activity.

In this article I present the case of the Polish profeminist movement whose actors seem to be relatively unrecognised as yet and whose activity is rather marginalised compared to female activists fighting for gender equality in Poland. The paper is based on field research which I conducted between 2009 and 2011 in Poland. During that period I conducted 18<sup>3</sup> in-depth interviews with men who identify themselves as profeminists

1 As mentioned above, the contemporary profeminist movement arose in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the roots of the movement can be found in works of European intellectuals such as John Stuart Mill, Nicolas de Condorcet, Jeremy Bentham, Hendrik Ibsen, August Bebel, as well as in the activity of the American abolition movement and its actors Frederick Anthony, Floyd Dell, Frederik Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and many others (Kimmel/Mossmiller 1992).

2 When talking about profeminist identity I refer to those elements of their individual and collective identities which are connected to the values and beliefs related to the definition of gender relations.

3 The interviews with profeminist men were part of my PhD project "Men's social movement in Poland. A sociological analysis of phenomena" conducted in the Department of Sociology at Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Besides profeminist I also interviewed actors from the Polish fathers' rights' movement, Polish mythopoetics and members of the male catholic group *Mężczyźni św. Józefa*. Between 2009 and 2011 50 in-depth interviews with actors from mentioned movements were conducted (by me and by two male researchers) in several Polish cities (such as Krakow, Warsaw, Poznań, Łódź, Gdynia, Wrocław, Bielsko-Biała, Szczecin). In this article I focus only on profeminist actors, which is why I have only used 18 interviews. During the fieldwork period the

or male feminists<sup>4</sup>. My research presents an analysis of the specificity of the Polish phenomenon, which can be helpful in understanding the different and multidimensional character of the Polish feminist movement.

## 2 The contemporary profeminist movement

The main goal of the contemporary profeminist movement is to create a certain type of social change which involves the elimination of gender inequalities. Actors criticise contemporary society as still being based on gender inequalities. In their opinion, the social order is still a patriarchal one and harms not only women but also men. Therefore, only “Feminism is going to make it possible for the first time for men to be free” (Dell 1917 as cited in Kimmel 2005: 105). This opinion is strongly connected to the rejection of the traditional male role which is based on hegemony and domination. According to Michael Messner (1997), the profeminists’ worldview assumes that:

“First, sexism is seen as a set of attitudes or values that can be unlearned. Second, in this system, ‘men as a group’ dominate women. In other words, men are viewed as a category of people who systematically oppress – and benefit from the oppression of – another category of people, women. Third, rape and other forms of sexual violence are viewed as ‘the extreme forms’ and the major locus of male domination of women” (Messner 1997: 51).

In this respect, members of the movement attempt to create new ways of being a man which fit into the model of society based on full gender equality.

Actors of the profeminist movement have been striving to promote their ideas in society through a variety of actions and campaigns. In their activities they try to focus mostly on the fight against women’s discrimination through work with men and boys. They appeal that all men should take responsibility for their own behaviour and work to deconstruct traditional male roles. That is why they organise conferences, workshops and courses where participants deal with their aggression and/or try to break gender stereotypes. Their activism is compatible with that of female activists: they organise media campaigns, happenings and street actions, run counselling and psychological help centres and organise different types of social action. The *White Ribbon Campaign* is the best known of these. One of the campaign’s founders, Michael Kaufman (2001), writes:

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youngest interviewee was 23 years old and the oldest one 37 years old; the majority were university graduates or students and worked as freelancers, teachers, researchers, journalists, social workers and educators. Most types of intimate relationships were represented (single men, husbands, men in informal relationships with both women and men). A few were also fathers.

- 4 Differences in terminology seem to be an important part of the Polish (pro)feminist discourse. Some actors call themselves “profeminist” (because they do not want to “steal” feminism from women), some “male feminist” (because of the “too weak” emotional appeal of “profeminism” as such) and some of them find those differences meaningless. Following Michael Kimmel’s line of argument (2005), in this article I have decided to use the term “profeminism” as the most appropriate in the Polish context.

"In 1991 a handful of men in Canada took the first step down a pathway whose future we did not know: we decided we have a responsibility to organize men to speak out against violence against women. We knew that most men in Canada were not violent towards women, but we also knew that the vast majority of us remained silent. Through our silence, we allowed the violence to continue. We adopted a white ribbon as a symbol. Wearing the ribbon would neither be an act of contrition, nor a symbol of misplaced guilt; it did not indicate that the wearer was a great guy. Rather, wearing the ribbon was a personal pledge never to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women. It would be a catalyst for discussion and soul-searching. It would be a public challenge to those many men who may use violence against a wife, girlfriend, family member or stranger. It would be a call on our policy-makers, opinion leaders, police and courts to make seriously this national and international epidemic. And it would be an act of love for the women in our life" (Kaufman 2001: 46).

Therefore, combating violence towards women became a priority in profeminist activity and its actors have become key allies of the feminist movement:

"Among the range of groups and campaigns enacted by men in the name of progressive gender agendas over the last three decades, anti-violence work has been the most persistent focus, has attracted the largest involvements, and has achieved the greatest international participation" (Flood 2005: 458).

As mentioned above, profeminist activists also organise marches and demonstrations which aim is to express their support for gender equality or to protest against current events or occurrences which are anti-feminist, homophobic or discriminatory character. These actions include *Walk a Mile in Her Shoes* marches against violence towards women organised by men in the US, or pickets against pornography outside the Playboy offices in London organised by *Anti-Porn Feminists*.

Another field of profeminist activity is linked to science and research. There are plenty of research institutes and initiatives affiliated both to universities and NGOs which deal with gender and masculinity issues and promote gender equality. They include the German *Dissens. e. V*; the Scandinavian research centre *GEXcell: Gendering EXcellence – Centre of Gender Excellence* and the US *Men's Studies Association*. Profeminist institutions organise scientific conferences and workshops and conduct research projects focusing on gender issues, including *CROME: Critical research on men in Europe* (2002–2004); *FOCUS: Fostering Caring Masculinities* (2005–2007) and current projects like *EIGE: Study on the involvement of men in gender equality in 27 EU countries* (2010–2012) and *Study on the role of men in gender equality* (2011–2012).

There are also several associations, foundations and informal groups. The *National Organization of Men Against Sexism (NOMAS)* is the biggest and the most well-known in the United States. In Canada, there is the above-mentioned *White Ribbon Campaign*. In Europe, organisations can be divided into two types: international, such as *European Men Profeminist Network* and *MenEngage*, and national. National groups include e.g. *Men for Gender Equality* (Sweden), *Männer Gegen Männer-Gewalt* (Germany) and the Italian *Male Plural*. Last but not least, groups with profeminist traits can be found in several African, Asian, Australian and South American groups. They include *Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training* (Nigeria), *the Association of Men Against Violence* (Nicaragua), *the Cambodian Men's Network* and the *Australian Centre for the Advancement of Men's Health*, and many others.

### 3 Historical background of the Polish phenomenon

Among all the Polish social phenomena which can be defined as men's movements, the profeminist can be described on the basis of new social movement categories. It is connected not only to its potential for creating significant social change, but also to the fact that the contemporary movement has its own historical background. One of the most well-known forerunners of the Polish profeminists is the writer, translator and social activist Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński. Żeleński started the very first broad-based, public discussion in Poland about reproductive rights and decriminalising abortion. His views were published in 1931 in one of the most significant books on women's rights in Poland *Piekło kobiet* (*Women's Hell*). In one of his essays in 1929, Żeleński initiated the first public debate about women's reproduction rights in Poland, which resulted in the publishing of the above-mentioned book. According to the author (1958):

"I think it is about time to break this 'pious' silence and start talking about this complex and difficult issue about which so many professionals have something to say, including from some time also those which are the most interested – women. Let's try to shed some light on this issue, collect the most broad-minded people's points of view. Let's try to raise awareness of women regarding the way to recognise their rights by male lawmakers" (Boy-Żeleński 1958: 16).

Żeleński spread the idea of conscious motherhood, sex education and the right to divorce, the decriminalisation of homosexuality and gender equality. He is also well known as one of the founders of the Polish division of the *International League of Sexual Reform – Liga Reformy Obyczajów* (*League of Customs Reform*) as well as of an institution which promoted conscious motherhood and birth control called *Poradnia Świadomego Macierzyństwa* (*The Conscious Motherhood Clinic*). The first organisation – like its international counterpart founded by Magnus Hirschfeld in 1928 in Copenhagen – had been campaigning for:

"[...] marriage reform, birth control, 'women's issues', eugenics, tolerance of single motherhood and sexual diversity, sex education, preventing prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases, sexual aberrations as well as law concerning sexual issues reform" (Gawin/Crozier 2006: 314).

The second organisation, *Poradnia Świadomego Macierzyństwa*, was active in several Polish cities and, according to Żeleński, its aim was to:

"[...] supply not only privileged ones but also those who need it the most with the benefits of conscious motherhood [...]. It is supposed to make women aware of the fact that it is possible and sometimes necessary to avoid pregnancy. It should provide them with an inexpensive and professional medical advice as well as the best and affordable contraceptives. It is not a charitable institution but a social institution [...]. Our aim is to create a society where only people who are able to nurture and raise children have them" (Boy-Żeleński 1958: 132).

The idea behind *Poradnia Świadomego Macierzyństwa* was revived after the Second World War (i.e. after Żeleński's death) by the group of physicians who in 1957 foun-

ded *Towarzystwo Świadomego Macierzyństwa* (*The Conscious Motherhood Society*). Unfortunately, because of the new political system in Poland in which independent organisations<sup>5</sup> were not permitted to exist, the development of profeminist and other grassroots social activity was inhibited. Issues connected to gender equality had been overtaken by official discourse and the authorities which promoted a policy of “equality between men and women”. This policy focused mostly on encouraging women to greater participation in the labour market (including professions which were recognised as traditionally male), while gender relations in the private sphere as well as power relations in the public sphere remained the same. Therefore, post-war gender equality policy can be called “a façade emancipation” which did not in fact change the traditional character of gender relations. The real changes started after 1989 with the birth of the contemporary feminist movement. Female activists laid the foundations for the public discourse on gender issues and, in doing so, enabled the rise of contemporary profeminists who (re)appeared on the Polish social scene several years later.

#### 4 The *Mężczyźni na Rzecz Równości* group – the ebb and flow and its implications

The founders of the internet discussion list *Mężczyźni na Rzecz Równości* [*Men for Equality*] can be regarded as a continuation of the activities of Żeleński and other early profeminists. The discussion list was started in November 2005, and over the next two years its members were very active and considered founding the first profeminist association in Poland. The birth of the group was connected to the mailing list *Gender*, which had been founded by activists from the *Fundacja Kobieta “eFKa”* (*Women’s Foundation “eFKa”*) a few years earlier. Some *Gender* list participants had decided to create a new and separate forum, mainly to discuss problems regarding masculinities and male feminism. As one of them said:

“The idea of creating our list was pretty spontaneous. Although we already had the *Gender* list and the *KPH* list (*Campaign against Homophobia*), I thought it would be good to start a new list as it is always a good idea. It is a tool for spreading information, arranging meetings and so on. [...] I sent information through *Gender* spontaneously. I hadn’t discussed it before with anyone else. I wrote this information, it was copied and pasted onto other lists and websites and started to grow. [...] I was fascinated by the growing statistics! And then our discussion had started” (Marcin<sup>6</sup>).

With time, the number of members on the list and the number of posts grew and resulted in the crystallising of members’ views and values. Among the most popular issues discussed were definitions of feminism, differences between female and male feminism (or profeminism and feminism), areas of women’s discrimination in contemporary Po-

5 Until 1989 the only organisation dealing with gender issues which was accepted was *Liga Kobiet Polskich* (*League of Polish Women*). For more on the complexity of the *Liga Kobiet Polskich*, see work in Sławomira Walczewska (2005) and Małgorzata Fuszara (2006).

6 All interviewees’ names have been changed.

land, the role of men in gender equality. Over time, the discussion started to turn from theory into practice. Members of the list decided to act more effectively and establish the first Polish profeminist association.

The idea of establishing the group for Polish profeminists appeared simultaneously among group of people running anti-violence workshops for men and young boys who were part of the bigger project *Mężczyźni na rzecz zmiany* (*Men for Change*) organised by *Towarzystwo Interwencji Kryzysowej* (*The Crisis Intervention Association*). Anna Lipowska-Teutsch (2006), its founder, wrote:

“The project *Mężczyźni na rzecz zmiany* aimed to create culturally adequate modules which were supposed to appeal to Polish experiences, Polish history, tradition and customs. These types of workshops should help boys/men to break free from patterns of behaviour combining masculinity with aggression and self-destruction” (Lipowska-Teutsch 2006: 94).

It was within this context that the idea of establishing the first Polish profeminist association was born, although there had been complications from the very beginning:

“The idea of creating an association appeared during the project *Mężczyźni na rzecz zmiany* [...]. The problem was that we all lived in different cities in Poland. There were some people from Krakow, Łódź, Kielce, Poznan and Warsaw. All of them were very enthusiastic about establishing this association and we decided that we had to register it” (Filip).

As a consequence, on the discussion list as well as during profeminist meetings attempts to mail goals and a manifesto were undertaken. Unfortunately, despite the relatively small number of members, many different opinions about the goals and political character of the future association had appeared and meant that it was impossible to reach decisions:

“The first sparks of conflicts was the lack of real action. One person from Łódź was supposed to register the association and hadn't done it for a very long time. And then it all started [...]. This person was already a member of other NGOs and was more into LGBTQ activity. People from Krakow for a change were more alter-globalists, left-wing activist, more revolutionary. That was the main difference between us. We had different ideas, different experiences and also this intercity issue was quite problematic because our only means of contact were emails and the list” (Filip).

As a result of the weak communication between the founders of the group as well as a number of disagreements about its future character, the idea of establishing a formal association failed and there is still no official profeminist organisation in Poland. That is why actions by Polish profeminists are organised differently. Different types of activists can be also singled out. The first type are men who are active in feminist organisations such as *Fundacja Kobięca “eFKa”* or *Feminoteka* (both organisations regularly publish articles and essays written by profeminist men). Others work in foundations and associations which act against discrimination of LGBTQ people, such as *KPH* or the *Miłość bez granic* (*Love without Borders*) group. Many profeminists cooperate with NGOs dealing with social inequality and exclusion, or promote human rights and civil society (*Towarzystwo Interwencji Kryzysowej*, *Amnesty International*, *Fundacja Krytyki Politycznej* [*Political Critique Foundation*] etc.).

Last but not least, a large group of profeminists are men who are not active in any social organisations. For them feminism is an important element of everyday life and helps them to create their individual identities. These men try to spread gender equality ideas and values in everyday life and in interpersonal relations in private and public life. As one of them said:

“I am not a member of any organisation. I have never liked this kind of thing [...]. I am not someone who engages in any great ‘ideas’ and actions which can save the world. It is enough for me to change something in my family or among my friends and pupils; [...] my feminism is an attempt to realise its goals in my head, in my environment and my everyday life. That’s how I see it” (Franciszek).

## 5 Actors of the movement

The different types of Polish actors are not only reflected in the wide range of groups and organisations, but also in varied “profeminist identities”. These can be connected to the reasons why someone becomes a profeminist or/and the type of social activity they prefer. One of the most common types are profeminists “by experience” who joined the movement following their childhood experiences, especially the relationship between their parents, which are very often affected by domestic violence:

“When I was a little kid my mom had a lot of trouble with her husband, my dad [...]. I realised there are situations in a woman’s life which she cannot resolve by herself and has to stick with. This showed me that there are many more women with difficult relations they cannot cope with. And I thought at the time that it is totally unfair and immoral. On the one hand, there was my mom, on the other my dad, and I thought he was doing everything wrong. Today, I think he was also caught up in certain cultural relations. But back then I accused him very strongly and that is how my feminist awareness arose” (Feliks).

Another type of profeminist biography is “by contact”. This group of men became profeminists thanks to female friends or a partner who introduced them to the movement and/or ideology:

“For the first time in my life I heard about feminism and its meaning after I met and started to live with my girlfriend. We started discussing feminism and very soon it turned out that she was a feminist [...] and now my wife. That was the moment I started reading about it and soon I became one of them” (Florian).

The role of partner-feminist is important not only during the moment of initiation into the movement, but also in the endless process of the evolution of feminist identity which changes when one acquires new experiences and social roles.

The third group of actors can be called “queer profeminists”. Here, the role of catalyst is played by non-heterosexuality, which helps with extending beyond traditional roles and gender constructions:

"I am transgender person. That is why I know exactly how it all feels. When someone tells me: 'O you've just read too many feminist books', I can simply say that it's not true, because I know it all from my personal experience. I know both sides of the coin because I was educated as a girl and I know what kind of oppression girls and women are subjected to" (Patryk).

These "queer actors" very often start their feminist journey doing (theoretical and practical) research on their non-heterosexual identity. This usually leads them to feminist thought, which is strongly connected to this topic:

"[...] it's all interconnected but it isn't that easy to define. Sometimes the spotlight is on one issue, sometimes on another. It is all mixed up, entangled and hard to grasp. It is not that one idea is about sexuality and another about feminism. It is all a melting pot and I really like it" (Michał).

This attitude is often related to a fourth group of actors which can be called "academic profeminists". This group is more linked to a certain form of activity rather than any specific motivation. Their activity is strongly linked to the movement's theoretical basis and the first contact with it is generally mediated through books or university classes. As a result, unlike the other types of actors, they are familiar with the canon of profeminist thought, for example Reawyn Connell, Michael Kimmel or Jeff Hearn, and they also concentrate on (pro)feminist issues in their academic work. At the same time, the majority in this group share a reluctance to engage in "street action", which, in turn, is a favourite form of action of the former group. "Street" profeminists are mostly active in the public space, during demonstrations, happenings and other mass events, which are usually organised by left-wing, feminist and LGBTQ groups and organisations.

The above-mentioned categories of actors in many cases differ considerably, although there are often overlaps. They constitute unique, individual identities, which in the same time, create the wider profeminist collective identity and co-exist with it. Simultaneously, collective identity is built on shared determinants such as age, level of education or type of profession. The majority of profeminists are graduates or students. As they are usually freelancers or work in public service and earn slightly more than the national average, they can be described as middle class. Therefore, they are the types of actors who, according to Claus Offe, form the normal foundation for new social movements (Offe 1995: 236). Polish profeminists are similar in terms of their political views and religious standpoint. The majority describe themselves as left-wing and others sympathise with "the centre" as a result of a lack of a "real", non-communist, left-wing party. They are usually atheists or supporters of forms of spirituality which are not connected to the Catholic Church.

## 6 Main values and goals

In general, profeminists share values and goals which are characteristic of actresses in the feminist movement in Poland. According to research on the Polish feminist standpoint, two of their most important values are freedom and the right to choice (Wojnicka

2009). The same hierarchy of values can be found among male supporters of feminism. Their main values and goals were introduced in the *Manifest Feministów* [*Feminists' Manifesto*], which was published in Iza Desperak's book *Homofobia, mizoginia i ciemnogród? Burzliwe dzieje kontrowersyjnych ustaw* (2008):

"We are feminists, men who support the feminist movement and we act for gender equality and justice. Some of us are political activists. We are mostly engaged in initiatives connected to the struggle against violence performed by other men. We support action in aid of men's health, participate in scientific research on men and masculinities, create and conduct gender-equality workshops [...]. We share a feminist diagnosis of society. We are convinced that women experience unfair and unequal treatment in society while men are privileged and have power. We think that the common model of masculinity restricts the freedom of women and also of men. We think that man is responsible for his sexist behaviours and attitudes. We work to dismantle the patriarchal model of masculinity [...]. We do not accept the model of masculinity which allows violence. We criticise destructive and oppressive features of male groups" (Felczak 2008: 185–187).

In other words, Polish profeminists focus on acting against gender inequality, which affects mostly women. In their opinion, women are discriminated by the unequal distribution of power which is visible both in the public and private sphere. Discrimination also means a lack of reproductive rights and all symbolic practices which underline women's subordination. Of these, language is one of the most important tools for creating situations which can be called "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu 2004; Kopciewicz 2005). However, in their view, the strongest manifestation of women's discrimination is male violence against them. Therefore, combating violence is one of the most important goal of profeminists, both in the Polish and global context:

"[...] Unfortunately, violence is the biggest problem. The perpetrators are usually men. I do not know any research on that but I think it is easier when men talk about violence with other men. That is my opinion. Women can say something about it too, but the reaction will be different, less meaningful, unfortunately. The issue of violence is a priority for me. And I am not only talking about physical but also psychological and symbolic violence, because violence is the source of all other problems which women and men have" (Marcin).

The problem of violence is connected to the idea of changing men's attitudes which are also affected by the patriarchal system. Profeminists want to deconstruct the traditional pattern of masculinity which still dominates Polish society.

As mentioned above, Polish actors do not have any official organisations and, therefore, they cooperate with members of other movements and institutions which share similar goals and values. They include left-wing groups (e.g. *Krytyka Polityczna*), anti-war movements (e.g. *Kobiety w Czerni* [*Women in Black*]), animal rights groups, alter-globalists etc. However, the most important allies are the female feminist movement and LGBTQ organisations:

"This cooperation should exist between all feminist and LGBTQ circles. Of course, only if they want to work with us [...]. If we discriminate, for example, gays and lesbians, we can discriminate everyone else: Jewish people, Arab people, disabled people, people with red hair, women, anyone" (Florian).

Some profeminists do not exclude cooperation with the progressive wing of the father's rights movement<sup>7</sup>, as a "natural" ally in fighting for gender equality and against gender stereotypes:

"I agree with some postulates of the father's movement.<sup>8</sup> It is a fact that they have problems with custody rights even if often they are very good parents. And the problem with paternity leave is that it is hard to take it. I would call it discrimination too. All these inequalities discriminate both women and men" (Marcin).

At the same time, profeminists, despite being aware of and appreciating their existence, do not have any alliances with international networks of profeminists such as the *European Men Profeminist Network* or *MenEngage*. Reasons include the non-existence of an official organisation which could be part of the network, a lack of motivation on the part of actors, as well as a language barrier. Therefore, compared to many female activists' biographies, experience living abroad or contacts with international scholars (e.g. Ann Snitow), universities or organisations, do not have an important role to play in the profeminist movement. That is why the Polish phenomenon cannot be described as part of the chain of transnational profeminist movement, despite the fact that its actors share similar values and goals.

## 7 Methods of acting

The first and most spectacular action organised by Polish profeminists was the first edition of the *White Ribbon Campaign*, which was the symbolic moment at which the movement was mobilised. The *Mężczyźni na rzecz równości* group co-organised an anti-violence march in Krakow in 2006 as part of the annual *16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence* and thus introduced this campaign to Poland:

"16 Days Against Violence was in fact the first and, at the same time, the last initiative of our group. And it worked. We organised a happening in Krakow, we had a table where everyone could draw his or her hand under our statement: I do not pay out to violence against women. It was indeed very interesting" (Piotr).

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7 However, Polish legislation is gender neutral and both parents are supposed to have equal custody rights, it is usually the mother who cares for the child. This situation is a result of stereotypical opinions based on the traditional gender role perspective that women, by nature, is better equipped to care for her children. As Małgorzata Fuszara (1994) writes: "Also in Poland in the 1950s, there was a tendency to give priority to mothers as regards custody rights. The evidence was not only the practice but also a 1953 Supreme Court judgment which stated that for a child – especially a young one – a mother's care is especially important because 'in accordance with nature' she has the ability to fulfill the child's needs." Today legal opinion is different but it does not always mean real change. In everyday life it is usually mothers who take care of children even when custody has formally been awarded to both parents (Fuszara 1994: 117).

8 More information about fathers' rights in Poland can be found in other articles by the author (Wojnicka 2011a, 2011b; Wojnicka/Struzik 2011).

Aside from the march and demonstration on the Main Market Square, the members of the discussion list took part in a meeting with actresses from the feminist movement and introduced them and other interested people to the idea of creating an association. Unfortunately, because of conflicts between group members about the division of labour and differences as regards the hierarchy of goals, members did not continue their activities and, as a result, did not follow up the idea of creating association. Instead, they took part in events organised by “befriended” movements and organisations, such as feminist *Manifa*, tolerance and equality marches organised by LGBTQ groups. Some profeminists also started working as gender equality trainees and educators.

A few years later, another group of men revived the public debate around gender equality in Poland which focused on men and masculinity issues. This, too, began through a direct link to the media and started with Wiktor Osiatyński’s manifesto *A czy Ty jesteś feministą?* [Are YOU a male feminist?]<sup>9</sup> (published in June 2009 in *Gazeta Wyborcza*.) Within a month the manifesto had been signed by 80 men<sup>10</sup> who declared themselves profeminist. They also declared their support for profeminist precepts, including the fight against violence against women, supporting women in their attempts to be a significant part of the Polish Parliament and promoting equality between people of all genders, races, religions and sexual orientations. Profeminist men (with Osiatyński in the vanguard) encouraged people to support the idea of gender equality on ballot papers.<sup>11</sup> They also collected signatures in such numbers that they were able to submit the project of Citizenship’s Act to the Polish Parliament. It is important to stress that the campaign was also supported by men who do not call themselves feminists although their social or professional activity could be described as profeminist.<sup>12</sup> These include journalists such as Piotr Pacewicz and Jacek Żakowski. The campaign was also supported by former members of the *Mężczyźni na rzecz równości* group as well as “street” and “academic” profeminists:

“I collected signatures at my university. In my opinion, it was a great way to introduce the feminist discourse to the whole of society. It encouraged people to hear and to think about feminism, they were able to meet feminists and stop being afraid of these women, who, in their former opinion, wanted to rule the world. That was a great opportunity for confrontation. A way of making people familiar with the ideology. A way to wake them up, to show them what feminists really do [...]. I really enjoyed that” (Fryderyk).

Last but not least, one of the most significant activities of Polish actors is “grassroots work”. For the majority, the feminist ideology is an integral part of their life, and being a profeminist is strongly connected to their everyday life:

9 Date of access 05. September 2012 at [http://wyborcza.pl/1,82949,6737623,A\\_czy\\_ty\\_jestes\\_feminista\\_.html](http://wyborcza.pl/1,82949,6737623,A_czy_ty_jestes_feminista_.html).

10 The majority are well-known intellectuals, artists and journalists. Osiatyński’s article was followed by the polemic text by a writer, Stefan Chwin, who rejected the idea of men being privileged.

11 The campaign was initiated during I Kongres Kobiet [Women’s Congress], which also took place in Warsaw in June 2009. Many profeminist men identified with the idea and supported women’s action.

12 The same attitude can be found among women. Some of them share feminist values and goals but have a non-feminist self-identity (e.g. those who claim “I am for gender equality, but I am not a feminist”).

"[...] It is connected to so-called 'everyday life': paying attention to certain issues, saying no to certain practices or situations, for instance sexist jokes or sexist comments [...]. It is also some kind of self-reflection, paying attention to my own practices, which are sometimes not that cool" (Piotr).

Everyday life activity is reflected in certain attitudes to partners and in attitudes to child-rearing, relations with parents and other relatives, friends and co-workers:

"I try to discuss all of these issues with my friends, sometimes I even pick on some behaviours: no you cannot say something like that, for example. I always shake hands with women because this is a way of deconstructing the homosocial practice of male brotherhood from which women are usually excluded" (Patrik).

The profeminist attitude is also present in the professional life of Polish actors. Some of them write about feminism and gender equality, do research on these issues or teach about them. Accordingly, all of them try to put as many feminist ideas as possible into their everyday professional relations: "[...] I always vote for female candidates, because they are usually very good at their job" (Maciej). "At work I often argue about a certain type of vocabulary in articles which underline the importance of women" (Feliks). "I try to invite people to my show who act for gender equality and make their voice 'visible'" (Mariusz).

## 8 Conclusions

The Polish profeminist movement is a very young and, so far, an ephemeral phenomenon. That is why it is hard to make any strong statements about its palpable influence on social change in Poland. The most problematic issue is the lack of an official organisational structure and its incidental presence in the public sphere. These two factors cause several problems, including the invisibility of the movement and a lack of knowledge about its values, goals and action; gender equality issues being associated only with women; and a lack of transnational cooperation with other profeminist organisations and/or research networks. Therefore, one of the most important challenges for profeminist actors in Poland is to create an official, stable structure which will help with:

- establishing a strong and visible movement of male feminists in Poland,
- increasing transnationality,
- gathering financial support for legislative activity as well as social actions and research projects,
- strengthening men and masculinity issues as a part of the Polish gender discourse.

Another important issue which is connected to the problem analysed here is the relationship between profeminist men and the feminist movement. So far, because of a lack of an official organisation of men, female actresses have not really been confronted with the problem of men in the movement. However, cooperation between key organisations

such as *Feminoteka* or *Fundacja Kobięca "eFKa"* and profeminist men seem to prove that this kind of alliance is possible and could help to both promote feminism not only among Polish women and to show that gender equality is also a men's issue.

Last but not least, despite the non-existence of an official organisation, many men "do" gender equality in their everyday life in Poland. This seems to be the most significant area of profeminist activity. According to Alberto Melucci (1995), everyday life activity (along with the existence of a collective identity and certain level of balance between activity and latency) is one of the most important measures of new social movements (Buechler 2008b: 167). Another is the existence of a collective identity, which is defined as "[...] an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups) and concerned with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the action takes place" (Melucci 1995: 44).

Therefore, Melucci's theory can be used as a theoretical framework for analysing the Polish profeminist movement and for justifying this phenomenon being defined on the basis of categories applied to social movements. Moreover, this corresponds to Michael Flood (1998) conclusions about Australian men's movements:

"So far I've been using the label 'men's movement' without comment, but it is worth pointing out that this 'movement' is different from others such as the women's, green, gay and lesbian, and labour movements [...]. As far as social movements go, the men's movement is also a relatively small one. It has certainly touched far less lives than say the women's, labour or green movements, and it has so far had far less influence on the character and direction of social institutions, governments and popular culture. Again, this is changing, and there are increasing signs that sections of the men's movement are learning how to flex their growing political muscles" (Flood 1998: 65).

In fact, the profeminist movement in many aspects differs from other Polish social movements such as the feminist movement. The range and number of profeminist activities and their influence on social change are smaller than, for instance, that of the environmental movement. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the phenomenon presented is a social fact (Durkheim 1968) defined as *in statu nascendi* (Sztompka 2009) structures and its presence based on the sociological categories applied to social movements is utterly justified.

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