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Suicides of teenagers on the Internet in the perspective of media pedagogy

Samobójstwa nastolatków w Internecie w perspektywie pedagogiki mediów

ABSTRACT

On the internet, we can find a lot of information on how to commit suicide; we can learn about various forms of suicide. There are more and more cases of internet suicides, committed online, live. According to a report prepared by the British Medical Journal in 2008, the internet encouraged more than discouraged people from committing suicide. In this article, I analysed the problem from the perspective of media education. How can the internet be the “culture of life”? How can we carry out effective suicide prevention?

KEYWORDS:

suicide, internet, youth,
media education

ABSTRAKT

Coraz częściej słyszymy o powstawaniu nowych witryn i forów internetowych, które zachęcają do popełniania samobójstwa wśród nastolatków. Internauci znajdujący dzięki wyszukiwarkom informacje o samobójstwie częściej są do niego zachęceni niż przed nim zniechęceni – wynika z raportu przygotowanego przez British Medical Journal w 2008 roku. W artykule chciałbym zanalizować problem od strony pedagogiki mediów. W jaki sposób możemy – również poprzez internet – prowadzić skuteczną profilaktykę suicydologiczną? Jak wychowywać do internetu by stawał się on kulturą sensu życia, a nie samobójczej śmierci?

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

samobójstwo, internet, młodzież,
edukacja medialna

More and more often, we hear about new websites and online forums that encourage teenagers to commit suicide. Internet users who find information about suicide through search engines are more often encouraged than discouraged to commit it, according to a report prepared by the British Medical Journal

in 2008.¹ We can also increasingly read about cases of suicide broadcast live in webcam chat rooms.

At the outset, I would like to present research published in the *British Medical Journal*. Then, we will analyse the case of Abraham K. Biggs, who committed suicide during an online video transmission. In this article, I would like to analyse the problem from the perspective of media pedagogy. How can we carry out effective suicide prevention by using the Internet? How can we educate ourselves about the Internet so that it becomes a culture of meaningful life rather than suicidal death?

DOES THE INTERNET ENCOURAGE TO COMMIT SUICIDE? AN ANALYSIS OF A BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL REPORT

In 2008, a group of English researchers led by Lucy Biddle² analysed 480 websites related to suicide. They published their results in the *British Medical Journal*. In four search engines (Google, Yahoo, MSN, and ASK) they typed in 12 search terms related to the topic of the study (in English): suicide, methods of committing suicide, effective (also painless, quick ...) methods of suicide, how to commit suicide, etc). They chose the first 10 results from each search engine for analysis. In this way they received 480 sites (12 terms × 10 results × 4 search engines).

Of this number, 90 pages were dedicated to suicide, half of which encouraged, induced, or facilitated the taking of one's life. The next 43 sites contained personal information about the various methods of committing suicide – including their advantages and disadvantages – without directly encouraging readers to commit it. Another 44 sites presented their visitors with ways of taking their lives

¹ "Suicide and the Internet." *British Medical Journal*, 2008, no. 4,???: <http://www.bmj.com/content/336/7648/800.full>. Accessed 02 February 2011. Cf. Internet zachęca do samobójstw, <http://www.wirtualnemedi.pl/artykul/internet-zacheca-do-samobojstw#>. Accessed 21 February 2011; Niesłuchowska, A. "Nastolatki: chcemy się zabić, nie ratujcie nas!" *Wiadomości*. <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1329,title,Nastolatki-chcemy-sie-zabic-nie-ratujcie-nas,wid,11027227,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=1bd3f>. Accessed 22 February 2011; "Umówmy się na... samobójstwo." *Fakty*. http://fakty.interia.pl/fakty_dnia/news/umowmy-sie-na-samobojstwo,718928. Accessed 22 February 2011; Kownacka, K. "Coraz więcej stron internetowych radzi, jak popełnić samobójstwo." <http://www.nto.pl/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090424/REPORTAZ/456590478>. Accessed 22 February 2011).

² Lucy Biddle, research fellow; Jenny Donovan, professor of social medicine; Keith Hawton, professor of psychiatry; Navneet Kapur, reader in psychiatry; and David Gunnell, professor of epidemiology.

in a completely objective (24 sites), partly humorous (12), or completely humorous (8) style. The search results also included 12 pages with chats and discussion forums about the methods of suicide.

On the other hand, 62 sites searched by the researchers were focussed on the prevention of suicide and 59 had content prohibiting or discouraging people from taking their own lives. However, these sites were ranked lower by search engines than sites encouraging suicide or informing about the ways of committing it.

Table 1. Results of the research published in the British Medical Journal report³

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated to suicide: 90 • Encouraging to commit suicide: 45 • Describing methods, but not encouraging: 43 • Showing suicide in fashionable terms: 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Against suicide: 59 • Preventive: 62 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other categories: 225 • Academic, political: 70 • Not found: 88 • Describing individual suicides: 12 • Chats about suicide methods: 12 • Chats where suicide is discussed: 8 • Other websites related to the subject of suicide: 35 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information websites: 44 • Actual objective information: 24 • Partially humorous: 12 • Completely humorous: 8 |

When interpreting the results, the researchers highlighted the availability of suicide-related content, the lack of regulation, and the irresponsibility of Internet service providers in this area. According to the researchers, the way to reduce access to websites containing messages that encourage or instruct people to commit suicide is for Internet service providers to block them and for parents to use content-control software if their children use the network. However, operators have no influence over the positioning of websites by search engines. The responsibility of the creators of such sites is also limited and it must first be proven that the content they present had an impact on a specific act of suicide. Polish law also does not prohibit the publishing of content that encourages suicide. Criminal liability concerns a direct influence on an act of suicide.⁴ We also have no influence over content uploaded to foreign servers.

³ <http://www.bmj.com/content/336/7648/800/T1.expansion.html>. Accessed 21 February 2011.

⁴ According to Article 151 of the Polish Penal Code, whoever persuades or renders assistance in laying violent hands on someone's life shall be subject to the penalty of imprisonment for a term of between three months and five years.

On the Polish Internet, one can also find websites that were classified in the British Medical Journal report. The sites that describe methods and cases of suicide are particularly problematic; for example, the blog *Requiem dla śmierci* [Requiem for death],⁵ marked by the hosting service provider as a website for adults, though this does not make it difficult for minors to use it. Other websites or individual blog entries are clearly humorous in nature and are intended in this perverse way to discourage others from committing suicide, such as the “Guide: How to commit suicide” on the website Nonsensopedia⁶ or entries such as “How to commit suicide” by the bloggers “Kominek” and “Dante”.⁷ There are also posts on Internet forums where young people discuss their problems with their parents as well as their intentions to commit suicide, such as on the forum *Zapytaj* [Ask].⁸

ONLINE SUICIDE: A CASE STUDY OF ABRAHAM K. BIGGS

A more worrying phenomenon is the increasing frequency of suicides committed “live” on the Internet.⁹ I would like to examine one such case: Abraham K. Biggs, a 19-year-old American from Florida who committed suicide in November 2008.¹⁰

On Wednesday morning, 19 November 2008, Abraham K. Biggs announced on the Internet that he wanted to commit suicide that very evening and to broadcast it via the website Justin.tv. Biggs committed suicide by overdosing on drugs. He died after a few minutes. The viewers of the broadcast were convinced that

⁵ <http://requiemdlasmierci.blox.pl>. Accessed 24 February 2011.

⁶ http://nonsensopedia.wikia.com/wiki/Poradnik:jak_popełnić_samobójstwo. Accessed 24 February 2011.

⁷ <http://kominek.blox.pl/2006/03/JAK-POPELNIC-SAMOBJSTWO.html>. Accessed 24 February 2011; <http://dan-te12042010.blogspot.com/2008/07/jak-popeni-samobjstwo.html>. Accessed 24/02/2011.

⁸ http://zapytaj.com.pl/Category/001,003/2,1617316,Najlepsza_metoda_popelnienia_samobjstwa-.html. Accessed 24 February 2011.

⁹ “Internet suicide.” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_suicide. Accessed 24 February 2011.

¹⁰ Cf. similar cases: the suicide of 27-year-old Marcin from Zagórze (Mękarska, D. “Samobójstwo w internecie: Marcin wołał o pomoc, nikt go nie usłyszał.” <http://www.nowiny24.pl/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090131/WEEKEND/973644836>. Accessed 15 February 2011); the suicide of a 24-year-old inhabitant of Sendai, Japan (“Popełnił samobójstwo – na żywo w Internecie.” <http://tvp.info/informacje/ludzie/popelnil-samobjstwo-na-zywo-w-internecie/3284839>. Accessed 15 February 2011. *Akty samobójcze w obu podanych tu przypadkach są zbliżone do historii Abrahama K. Biggs-a, dotyczą jednak osób 20-letnich.*

this was a joke; they encouraged Biggs to commit suicide. Previously, through the online forum BodyBuilding.com, among others, they had ridiculed the teenager and encouraged him to commit the act. After a few hours, seeing Biggs lying still, the audience realised the tragedy that had taken place. The medical team which was called in confirmed his death.

When interpreting the results, the researchers highlighted the availability of suicide-related content, the lack of regulation, and the irresponsibility of Internet service providers in this area.

After the event, Justin.tv administrators withdrew the recording from the website, explaining that it had violated the rules of the social network. At the same time, they rejected the charges against the website, stressing its open nature and their inability to monitor all entries in the service on an ongoing basis.¹¹

The behaviour of the viewers of Abraham K. Biggs' suicide played an important role. Firstly, we are dealing here with "cyberbullying", the persecution of another person over the Internet. It can vary in its forms and tools. Usually, it is composed of bullying, harassment, and mockery of other people using the Internet (forums, chats, communicators) or mobile phones (text messages and MMSs). According to the Safer Internet 2007 report, between 6 February and 31 December 2007, 524 out of 1,408 notifications to helpline.org.pl (a portal that deals with the spread of harmful content on the Internet) were related to cyberbullying, which makes this problem the second most reported (first place belonged to questions about safety rules on the Internet, with 549 notifications).¹² Cyberbullying is not

¹¹ Gannes, L. "19-year-old Commits Suicide on Justin.tv." <http://gigaom.com/video/19-year-old-commits-suicide-on-justintv>. Accessed 15 February 2011; Gontarczyk, P. "Wstrząsający film na żywo w sieci nie był żartem. Nastolatek popełnił samobójstwo." <http://pclab.pl/news34462.html>. Accessed 15 February 2011.

¹² "Raport Safer Internet 2007." <http://www.saferinternet.pl/images/stories/raport2007.pdf>. Accessed 22 February 2011.

a prohibited act in the Polish Penal Code. It is, however, punishable when it takes the form of slander, insults, punishable threats, the destruction of IT data, or obstructing access to IT data, which may be considered manifestations of cyberbullying. Injured parties may claim their rights and sue persecutors in a civil trial for infringement of personal rights.

The second important problem concerning the behaviour of the audience of the tragic event was their treatment of the teenager. The audience was not convinced that he really wanted to do this and did not take him seriously. Therefore, perhaps part of the audience encouraged him to commit suicide, even recommending certain methods, and the rest of the audience tried to prevent the tragedy by treating the event seriously. However, this fact does not explain the behaviour of the audience. What could be the cause? The problem is the anonymous nature of online communication. It is easier to humiliate, discredit, and harass when one can hide behind an online pseudonym and there is no need to confront one's victim. The Internet also disturbs the sense of the reality of events. The participants of the communication process are not sure whether an event is not fake, played out. After all, on the Internet one can find information about fake suicide attempts.¹³ In this case, however, the message had was audio-visual, which increased its credibility, as opposed to online verbal communication.

As one can read in the event report, it was only after a few hours that the case became serious and tragic. The explanation of the website administrators is important here. Michael Seibel, the managing director of Justin.tv, said that the explanation of the website's administrators is important:

“as far as the incident is concerned, we do not comment on individual video recordings; however, our policy prohibits placing inappropriate content on the portal. We advocate tagging such video recordings by the portal users themselves. When such a video is tagged by users, we check it and quickly remove it from the service if it contradicts our terms of use. (...) As a result of this event, we are convinced that all members of the online community will be more alert and protect other users in the future.¹⁴

¹³ Cf. e.g. “Udawane samobójstwo w Internecie.” <http://www.tvn24.pl/0,1615391,0,1,udawane-samobojstwo-w-internecie,wiadomosc.html>. Accessed 22 February 2011.

¹⁴ Gannes, L. op. cit.; Stelter, B. “Web Suicide Viewed Live and Reaction Spur a Debate.” http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/25/us/25suicides.html?_r=2&th&emc=th. Accessed 22 February 2011.

The problem is therefore difficult to solve only by introducing legal regulations. Also, responsibility does not lie solely with the Internet service provider. The problem is the responsibility of the users of social networks. It can therefore be said that preventing similar events in the future requires us to undertake educational and media activities, to simultaneously educate the culture of Internet communication and raise awareness of the responsibility for communication among the users of social networking sites themselves.

THE “WERTHER EFFECT”: THE MEDIA AND THE PROBLEM OF SUICIDE

The media have a particular responsibility when it comes to reporting on suicides. Describing and showing individual cases of suicide can lead to the “Werther effect”, i.e. young people imitating a given case and an increase in the incidence of suicides. The name comes from the well-known work of Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. After the first publication of the novel, there was a fashion among young romantics to imitate the main character, starting by wearing a similar outfit (a blue tailcoat with a yellow waistcoat) and ending with suicides. In 1974, sociologist David Phillips coined the term the “Werther effect”. It defines the relationship between a sudden increase of suicides and the suicide of a well-known person¹⁵ publicised in the media beforehand. Another documented case is the publication of a novel by Derek Humphrey entitled *Final exit*,¹⁶ in which the author described the methods of committing suicide, among other things. The publication also triggered the phenomenon of collective imitative suicides. The same was the case with the French translation of the book.

According to Phillips’ research, suicides involving famous people (celebrities) have a strong impact on those who would like to commit it. The effect is also intensified by television. The number of suicides was found to increase within 10 days of the information appearing on TV news. High-profile suicide cases also have a stronger impact.

¹⁵ As cited in De Wyze, J. “Why Do They Die?” <http://www.sandiegoreader.com/news/2005/mar/31/why-do--they-die>. Accessed 24 February 2011). Cf. Phillips, D. P. Suicide rates increased significantly after suicide stories were reported newspaper stories. The increase was proportional to the amount of newspaper coverage devoted to the suicide stories, “American Sociological Review” 1974 Vol. 39, pp. 340–354.

¹⁶ Humphrey, D. “Final Exit: The Practicalities of Self-Deliverance and Assisted Suicide for the Dying.” New York: Dell Publishing, 1991. Accessed 24 February 2011.

As far as the impact of feature films is concerned, it is difficult to determine its manner and scale. Some messages increase suicidal behaviour, while others do not. There is also no correlation between music, plays, and suicide. There is also a lack of scientific research analysing the impact of websites that encourage suicide on real suicide cases.¹⁷

On Wednesday morning, 19 November 2008, Abraham K. Biggs announced on the Internet that he wanted to commit suicide that very evening and to broadcast it via the website Justin.tv. Biggs committed suicide by overdosing on drugs. He died after a few minutes. The viewers of the broadcast were convinced that this was a joke; they encouraged Biggs to commit suicide.

Suicide – from the point of view of modern journalism – is a message that can arouse the curiosity of the recipient. This is why the media are interested in passing on information about suicide acts, especially when it comes to unusual cases. Most often, these cases are unusual, hence the accusation against the media that they can act as an instructor of suicidal behaviour, and even the suggestion that this subject should be completely banned from social media. The researchers, however, stress that what is important here is not the information about suicide itself, but the way it is communicated. Equally important is the frequency of the message, which has an impact on the number of imitative suicides committed.¹⁸

¹⁷ As cited in Polskie Towarzystwo Suicydologiczne. *Zapobieganie samobójstwom. Poradnik dla pracowników mediów*, Światowa Organizacja Zdrowia, Geneva-Warsaw, 2003. http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/en/suicideprev_media_polish.pdf. Accessed 24 February 2011), pp. 12–13.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

In 2003, the World Health Organisation published a guide for media professionals on how to describe and present suicide cases.¹⁹ They concern providing general information about the problem of suicide, describing and presenting specific suicide attempts, and promoting prevention and assistance in this area.

As regards recommendations for providing general information on suicides, the authors of the guide recall the principle of journalistic integrity in the use of information sources (statistics and informants). Generalisations and evaluations in commenting on events, i.e. a “suicide epidemic”, “the place with the highest number of suicides in the world”, or “successful suicide” should be avoided, and live commentary should be carefully prepared. Suicidal behaviour also should not be described as an understandable response to degradation or social and cultural change.

In terms of the description of particular cases, the authors of the guide advise to avoid luridness when describing suicides, especially when it comes to well-known people. Detailed descriptions of the methods used and the preparations made should be avoided. Suicide should not be described as something inexplicable or too simplistic, either. Suicide is usually caused by a complex interaction of various factors, such as physical and mental illness, abuse of psychoactive agents, family problems, stress, etc. Suicide should also not be presented as a way of dealing with personal problems (as an escape from problems...), i.e. bankruptcy, sexual harassment, or failure to pass an exam. When reporting a suicide, one should take into account the impact this event has on family members and other survivors, their mental condition, and the related social stigma. Nor should the victims of suicide be glorified, or shown as martyrs worthy of public admiration. Instead, we should focus on mourning the suicide victim. On the other hand, describing the physical consequences of unsuccessful suicide attempts (electric shock or brain damage) can act as a deterrent to potential suicide victims.

The guide also suggests how to inform about available assistance and suicide prevention. The media can actively contribute to suicide prevention. It is good to publish contact information for mental health clinics, psychiatric institutions, and telephone helplines. It is also good when the media provides information on how to recognise suicidal warning signals or addressing mental health problems in counselling programmes, e.g. depression, which can often lead to suicidal attempts. It is good when journalists express their sympathy to surviving relatives

¹⁹ Ibidem, pp. 16–18.

of a victim and informs them of the available forms of assistance (support groups, mental health professionals, etc.).

The media therefore bear a great deal of responsibility for the contemporary problem of suicide. We too – the recipients and users of the media – have a responsibility, especially with regard to the Internet, which is a medium that is difficult to regulate and control.

THE INTERNET AS THE “CULTURE OF LIFE”: EDUCATIONAL AND MEDIA DEMANDS

This year’s Safer Internet Day (8 February 2011) was held in the countries of the European Union under the motto “The Internet is more than just fun: It’s your life”.²⁰ If the Internet is becoming or is already an important part of my life, I take responsibility for it and want it to be the “culture of life”.²¹ It encouraged personal development, aroused cognitive interests, and enriched morally. This is a common task for all of us as the users of services, websites, forums, chats, and instant messengers. It can also be said to be one of the main objectives of modern media education, the task of which is to educate the public. We should also remember that the media (including the Internet) are only tools whose use depends on us as its users. They can become carriers of both positive and harmful, destructive and even criminal ideas and values.²²

So what can we do to make the Internet the “culture of life”? What educational measures can we take in the field of media pedagogy? What prevention programmes and social campaigns can we initiate to counteract the problem of

²⁰ See the Safer Internet Day 2011 press release: http://www.saferinternet.pl/dbi_wiadomosci/informacja_prasowa:_dzien_bezpiecznego_internetu_2011.html. Accessed 24 February 2011.

²¹ Peters, T. *Nowe media w USA: budowanie on-line kultury życia*, translated by R. Lizut. <http://www.naszdziennik.pl/index.php?dat=20091219&typ=my&id=my81.txt>. Accessed 24 February 2011); “Media a kultura życia.” <http://www.lamsan.com.pl/media-a-kultura-zycia>. Accessed 24 February 2011.

²² For more on this, see Łęcicki, G. “Edukacja medialna jako istotna cecha nowoczesnego społeczeństwa.” *Kultura – Media – Teologia*, 2010, no. 3, pp. 70–80. <http://www.kmt.uksw.edu.pl/edukacja-medialna-ce-cha-nowoczesnego-spoleczenstwa-artykul>. Accessed 24 February 2011.

online suicides? I asked two Polish suicidologists to help me formulate the directions of action, in email correspondence.²³

Włodzimierz Brodniak, Ph.D., secretary of the Polish Suicidological Society, admitted that the problem is not being monitored in Poland and that there are few preventive or assistance initiatives. He gave as an example a website, which unfortunately no longer exists: www.przyjaciele.org. In his opinion, the biggest problem is “suicide pacts”, in which there is a mutual agreement to commit suicide by several people, in which the Internet plays the role of the basic communicator. According to Brodniak, Ph.D., films such as “Sala Samobójców” [Suicide Room], directed by Jan Komasa, are a good form of prevention. The film tells the story of Dominik (played by Jakub Gierszał), a high school graduate and the son of very wealthy, but also very busy parents. As we read in the announcement of the screening: “his seemingly orderly world breaks down when he is humiliated by a peer and falls victim to bullying via social networking sites. Dominik then closes up in a virtual world where he meets Sylwia (played by Roma Gąsiorowska), who introduces him to the ‘suicide room’ in an online game. Embraced by an older girl, the queen of the virtual world, the boy puts his real life in danger”.²⁴ According to the director of the film, “this is a story about the great need for love, which in the world of the Internet can become mortally dangerous”.^{25 26}

In turn, Professor Agnieszka Dmitrowicz, MD, Ph.D., president of the Scientific Section of Suicidology of the Polish Psychiatric Association and head of the Clinic of Adolescent Psychiatry and the Department of Psychiatry of the Medical University of Łódź, assessed the problem as urgent and demanding a two-pronged approach: the diagnosis of the threat and counteraction and prevention. As she admits, “as far as the diagnosis of the phenomenon is concerned, we generally

²³ Personal correspondence with W. A. Brodniak, Ph.D., 4 May 2011; Personal correspondence with Prof. A. Dmitrowicz, 5 May 2011.

²⁴ „Sala samobójców” na Berlinale – głos polskiego reżysera.” <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1342,title,Sala-samobojcow-na-Berlinale-glos-polskiego-rezysera,wid,13128070,wiadomosc.html>. Accessed 24 February 2011.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ “Jan Komasa o „Sali samobójców” przed Berlinale.” <http://film.onet.pl/wiadomosci/jan-komasa-o-swoim-filmie-sala-samobojcow-przed-be,1,4119375,wiadomosc.html>. Accessed 24 February 2011). *lilon people are suffering from Facebook Addiction Disorder (accessed FAD)*. <http://sickfacebook.com/350million-people-suffering-facebook-addiction-disorder-fad>. Accessed 24 February 2011.

know little about the prevalence of suicidal behaviour in Poland; even in psychiatric hospitals suicide attempts are not recorded.” The Polish Psychiatric Association also plans to develop standards for dealing with online suicide cases, which has not been done to date.

The above statements point to at least two types of actions and practical measures related to the problem of Internet suicides. In both groups, social media and media education can play an important role.

The first group concerns *problem diagnosis and monitoring*. Thanks to the cooperation with administrators of websites, forums, and Internet chat rooms, it would be possible to develop technical improvements and standards of conduct in the event of prospective attacks. In this group of problems – in addition to solutions of a technical or legal nature – there is a need to prepare a training programme for those responsible for providing Internet services. As Professor A. Dmitrowicz noted in her letter, it was the “administrator of the website of the Polish Psychiatric Association that asked her to develop the standards of conduct in case of the appearance of information about suicidal intentions on the website”.

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Diagnosis and monitoring would also involve the use of new Internet techniques for statistical analysis, which would be extremely valuable in recognising the scale of the phenomenon and the conditions under which it occurs.

The second group of measures would concern *prevention and social education*, where a special role for the media and media education can be perceived. The example of the film given above is one of many such activities in this group. In addition to the film, a nationwide social campaign on the subject should be launched using the available media, from billboards, through leaflets and brochures,

to participation in television counselling programmes by experts who are properly prepared for this. This could also be the main topic of the next Safer Internet Day and the subject of greater involvement of those responsible for Safer Internet in Europe. In doing so, it is important to bear in mind the Werther effect mentioned above and, when preparing such a campaign, to develop specific precautionary rules for dealing with the problem of online suicides.

It seems a good solution not so much to address the problem of suicide itself directly, but as part of a larger phenomenon; here I am thinking of the alienation of Internet users from the real community, which may also result in suicide. The problem relates to excessive, even addictive, use of the Internet, especially recently from social networking sites such as Facebook.²⁷ An example of an interesting campaign is the one entitled Web 2.0 Suicide Machine,²⁸ which encourages a particular type of online suicide that discourages virtual space and calls for a return to activity in the real world. "Suicide" in this sense consists in the removal of one's own social account. It should be noted, however, that the action is radical in nature and has therefore been criticised by social networking sites.²⁹ Media education aims at promoting a more positive model of media use, assumes the principle of moderation and proportion, does not focus solely on negative phenomena, and is not an incentive for radical action.

The role of media education is to build and promote appropriate attitudes towards using the Internet, by identifying good practices in this area, raising awareness by conducting lessons in schools or through extracurricular education, e.g. in the form of workshops for young people or training for educators and parents. It is also about individual media reflection on the subject. As users, let us question our own use of the Internet; let us share building websites and promote good

²⁷ Uzależnienie to ma już swoje określenie we współczesnej psychiatrii: FAD – Facebook Addiction Disorder. Zob. M. Fenichel, Facebook Addiction Disorder (FAD), <http://www.fenichel.com/facebook/> (Accessed 24.02.2011); 350million people are suffering from Facebook Addiction Disorder (Accessed FAD), <http://sickfacebook.com/350million-people-suffering-facebook-addiction-disorder-fad/> (Accessed 24.02.2011).

²⁸ <http://suicidemachine.org>. Accessed 24 February 2011; Szymański, D. "Samobójstwo w internecie? Teraz to możliwe." http://www.benchmark.pl/aktualnosci/Samobojstwo_w_internecie._Teraz_to_mozliwe-26155.html. Accessed 24 February 2011.

²⁹ "Facebook walczy z internetowym samobójstwem." http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/Wiadomosci/1,80708,7422415,Facebook_walczy_z_internetowym_samobojstwem.html. Accessed 24 February 2011.

practices aimed at restoring the value of real communication; let us teach our children to use the Internet safely; but more importantly, let us communicate the meaning and beauty of life to them. This is our pedagogical task for a new decade of media development.

About the autor

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