

An Open Letter to Facebook

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[Facebook](#), [Breakthrough](#), [Gender](#), [Gender Violence](#), [Misogyny](#), [Sexism](#), [Vday](#), [Violence Against Women](#), [Technology News](#)

We, the undersigned, are writing to demand swift, comprehensive and effective action addressing the representation of rape and domestic violence on Facebook. Specifically, we call on you, Facebook, to take three actions:

1. Recognize speech that trivializes or glorifies violence against girls and women as hate speech and make a commitment that you will not tolerate this content.
2. Effectively train moderators to recognize and remove gender-based hate speech.
3. Effectively train moderators to understand how online harassment differently affects women and men, in part due to the real-world pandemic of violence against women.

To this end, [we are calling on Facebook users to contact advertisers](#) whose ads on Facebook appear next to content that targets women for violence, to ask these companies to withdraw from advertising on Facebook until you take the above actions to ban gender-based hate speech on your site.

Specifically, we are referring to groups, pages and images that explicitly condone or encourage rape or domestic violence or suggest that they are something to laugh or boast about. Pages currently appearing on Facebook include Fly Kicking Sluts in the Uterus, Kicking your Girlfriend in the Fanny because she won't make you a Sandwich, Violently Raping Your Friend Just for Laughs, Raping your Girlfriend and many, many more. Images appearing on Facebook include photographs of women beaten, bruised, tied up, drugged, and bleeding, with captions such as "This bitch didn't know when to shut up" and "Next time don't get pregnant."

These pages and images are approved by your moderators, while you regularly remove content such as pictures of women breastfeeding, women post-mastectomy and artistic representations of women's bodies. In addition, women's political speech, involving the use of their bodies in non-sexualized ways for protest, is regularly banned as pornographic, while pornographic content - prohibited by your own guidelines - remains. It appears that Facebook considers violence against women to be less offensive than non-violent images of women's bodies, and that the only acceptable representation of women's nudity are those in which women appear as sex objects or the victims of abuse. Your common practice of allowing this content by appending a [humor] disclaimer to said content literally treats violence targeting women as a joke.

The latest global [estimate](#) from the [United Nations Say No UNITE](#) campaign is that the percentage of women and girls who have experienced violence in their lifetimes is now up to an unbearable 70 percent. In a world in which this many girls and women will be raped or beaten in their lifetimes, allowing content about raping and beating women to be shared, boasted and joked about contributes to the normalisation of domestic and sexual violence, creates an atmosphere in which perpetrators are more likely to believe they will go unpunished, and communicates to victims that they will not be taken seriously if they report.

According to a UK [Home Office Survey](#), one in five people think it is acceptable in some circumstances for a man to hit or slap his wife or girlfriend in response to her being dressed in sexy or revealing clothes in public. And 36 percent think a woman should be held fully or partly responsible if she is sexually assaulted or raped whilst drunk. Such attitudes are shaped in part

by enormously influential social platforms like Facebook, and contribute to victim blaming and the normalisation of violence against women.

Although Facebook claims, not to be involved in challenging norms or censoring people's speech, you have in place procedures, terms and community guidelines that you interpret and enforce. Facebook prohibits hate speech and your moderators deal with content that is violently racist, homophobic, Islamophobic, and anti-Semitic every day. Your refusal to similarly address gender-based hate speech marginalizes girls and women, sidelines our experiences and concerns, and contributes to violence against us. Facebook is an enormous social network with more than a billion users around the world, making your site extremely influential in shaping social and cultural norms and behaviors.

Facebook's response to the many thousands of complaints and calls to address these issues has been inadequate. You have failed to make a public statement addressing the issue, respond to concerned users, or implement policies that would improve the situation. You have also acted inconsistently with regards to your policy on banning images, in many cases refusing to remove offensive rape and domestic violence pictures when reported by members of the public, but deleting them as soon as journalists mention them in articles, which sends the strong message that you are more concerned with acting on a case-by-case basis to protect your reputation than effecting systemic change and taking a clear public stance against the dangerous tolerance of rape and domestic violence.

In a world in which hundreds of thousands of women are assaulted daily and where intimate partner violence remains one of the leading causes of death for women around the world, it is not possible to sit on the fence. We call on Facebook to make the only responsible decision and take swift, clear action on this issue, to bring your policy on rape and domestic violence into line with your own moderation goals and guidelines.

Sincerely,

Laura Bates, [The Everyday Sexism Project](#) ; Soraya Chemaly, [Writer and Activist](#)

Jaclyn Friedman, [Women, Action & the Media \(WAM!\)](#)

[Angel Band Project](#) [Anne Munch Consulting, Inc.](#)

[Association for Progressive Communications Women's Rights Programme](#)

[Black Feminists](#) [The Body is Not An Apology Breakthrough](#)

[Catharsis Productions](#) [Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation](#)

[Collective Action for Safe Spaces](#) [Collective Administrators of Rapebook](#) [CounterQuo](#)

[End Violence Against Women Coalition](#) [The EQUALS Coalition](#) [Fem 2.0](#)

[Feminist Peace Network](#) [The Feminist Wire](#) [FORCE: Upsetting Rape Culture](#) [A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World](#) [Hollaback!](#) [Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault](#)

Jackson Katz, PhD., Co-Founder and Director, [Mentors in Violence Prevention](#)

Lauren Wolfe, Director of WMC's [Women Under Siege](#)

[Media Equity Collaborative](#)

[MissRepresentation.org](#) [No More Page 3](#) [Object](#) [The Pixel Project](#)

[Rape Victim Advocates](#) [Social Media Week](#) [SPARK Movement](#) [Stop Street Harassment](#)

[Take Back the Tech!](#) [Tech LadyMafia](#) [Time To Tell](#) [The Uprising of Women in the Arab](#)

[World](#) [V-Day](#) [The Voices and Faces Project](#) [The Women's Media Center](#)

[Women's Networking Hub](#) [The Women's Room](#)