

## 15 What We Talk About When We Talk About Community

Siân Evans, Jacqueline Mabey, Michael Mandiberg, and Melissa Tamani

Four members of Art+Feminism speak to the challenges and invisible work of organizing community from an intersectional feminist perspective within the larger Wikipedia community.

As Wikipedia enters its third decade, an honest conversation about community—how we build it, who is included, and how we care for it—is urgently needed. In engaging with Wikipedia through a feminist lens, we, the lead co-organizers of Art+Feminism, continually reflect on what it means to build and participate in communities, online and in person, within the Wikimedia movement and outside of it. A key insight for us is that when we talk about “community,” we cannot assume that we are speaking of the same thing. In doing our work, conflict has emerged when we run up against the unspoken presuppositions about what kind of participation counts and who can edit the encyclopedia that “anybody can edit.” Using Art+Feminism as a case study, we will explore the work of information activism and community building in open source communities like Wikipedia with an eye toward building more inclusive, diverse, and equitable communities.

Art+Feminism is a do-it-yourself and do-it-with-others campaign to improve Wikipedia’s content on gender, feminism, and the arts. We train editors of all gender identities and expressions how to edit in response to the gaps in participation and content on the most important popular free culture project. The Art+Feminism model was, from the beginning, a radical reworking of how edit-a-thons are organized. Art+Feminism was catalyzed by two separate conversations that took place in fall 2013 between the four cofounders, Siân Evans, Jacqueline Mabey, Michael Mandiberg, and Laurel Ptak. Evans was sharing her ideas about how to reboot the Women and Art Special Interest Group (SIG) associated with the Art Libraries Society

of North America with Mabey. They discussed the Ada Lovelace Day Wikipedia edit-a-thons, which had recently been in the news; the goal of these events is to write about the work of women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math).<sup>1</sup> Evans thought a similar event focusing on women in the arts might breathe life into the dormant SIG. Mabey later relayed this information to Michael Mandiberg, an artist and educator, who had used Wikipedia in teaching, assigning students stub articles to expand instead of term papers. Coincidentally, that same day Mandiberg engaged curator Laurel Ptak in a similar conversation. At the time, Ptak was a fellow at Eyebeam, a center for art and technology in New York, researching cyber-feminism. Mandiberg encouraged her to organize an edit-a-thon focused on art, technology, and feminism as a part of her fellowship. With so many simultaneous conversations, it seemed like the project was meant to be.

Art+Feminism emerged during a period of growing public awareness of the varied ways structural inequality plays out on Wikipedia. In 2011, the *New York Times* published a debate on the topic of Wikipedia's gender gap, opening up a public discourse on open culture and the ways in which it can be, at best, "clubby" and, at worst, toxic for women.<sup>2</sup> Two years later, writer Amanda Filipacchi authored an opinion piece for the *Times*, in response to a Wikipedian who was removing women from the "American novelists" category and moving these articles into a subcategory for "American women novelists"<sup>3</sup> in an attempt to improve the layout of a lengthy page. The result was a category purged of women, who had been moved elsewhere. Filipacchi's article generated several other think pieces on the topic as well as a flood of commentary, tagged #AmericanWomenNovelists, on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter.<sup>4</sup> However, at the same time, Wikipedians were discussing this practice on Wikipedia's talk pages.<sup>5</sup> While the issues were the same, these conversations were worlds apart. We wanted to draw attention to the ability of individuals to engage with these debates on Wikipedia. But, as soon as we brought some people into this debate on Wikipedia, their votes were considered campaigning and thus were struck by experienced Wikipedians. From the start, Art+Feminism was shaped by this insider-outsider dynamic that would continue to play out in our six years working on the project.

The cofounders met via video conference on November 2013 to discuss the possibility of collaboration. We agreed to hold an event at Eyebeam and widely distribute a call for participation among our personal and

professional networks. The call to participation quickly went viral: that first year, thirty-one edit-a-thons took place in locations across six countries with approximately six hundred participants creating 101 new articles and improving at least ninety articles.<sup>6</sup> The response to the call for participation was no doubt fueled by a desire to correct the historical record. Organizers and participants wanted to see themselves reflected in Wikipedia and for Wikipedia to more accurately represent our histories.

We have argued elsewhere that the success of our outreach is due to our method of communicating and organizing primarily off-wiki,<sup>7</sup> as opposed to on Wikipedia meetup pages. We sent out our call for participation via email, professional list serves, and social media. We theorized that the steep learning curve for Wikipedia editing (especially before the advent of the VisualEditor in 2015) was disincentivizing for organizers. First of all, how were new editors supposed to find events that only existed on a platform they were unfamiliar with and which was never designed for discoverability? And, second, organizing on-wiki required the event organizers to be comfortable both in Wikitext and the Wikimedia community. Of course, many women already felt unwelcome in the community, so how were they to be expected to organize solely on its platform?

The topic touched a nerve. People and organizations that we had no direct relationship with were quickly reaching out. We kept an eye on the Facebook event page, the Wikipedia meetup page, and our communal email address; whenever anyone posted about wanting to start their own event, we immediately reached out with assistance. The event at Portland State University came together via a discussion on the Facebook event page in a matter of minutes.<sup>8</sup> We supported each node in different ways. For some locations we organized all of the key elements (location, subject area expert, Wikipedians) while some of the venues approached us with all elements assembled; most of the events were somewhere in between. This organizational strategy continues to be true, six years later. As our community has grown, however, we have come to wonder: what is Art+Feminism's place within the larger Wikipedia community?

### **Who Gets to Decide Who Belongs on a Platform for "Everyone"?**

Community is a complex term because while it implies inclusion, it can often entail exclusion as well. As an adjective, it is often used to suggest

uncomplicated goodness, but we must remember that exclusion is what creates the conceptual coherence of a community. This is, unfortunately, particularly true of open source communities, such as Open Source Software or Free/Libre Open Source Software. Wikipedia's gender gap is certainly not unique. An analysis of the 2017 GitHub Open Source Survey showed that 90 percent of survey respondents identified as male, with only 3 percent identifying as women and 1 percent as nonbinary. Less than 1 percent identified as transgender. Further, only 14 percent of respondents identified as a minority in their country of residence.<sup>9</sup> Because these projects are open with few barriers to entry, one would assume that there should be no problem for new participants. However, for at least a decade, female developers have complained of the "unfriendly atmosphere both online and offline."<sup>10</sup> Open source communities are complex social worlds whose "flame wars" can be discouraging for new participants, especially women and members of other marginalized communities.

Perhaps the most obvious example of how a culture of online harassment plays out on Wikipedia was the conduct on pages related to Gamergate. The controversy known as "Gamergate" itself became public in 2014 when several women involved in the video game industry became the victims of a series of online and offline misogynistic attacks. Although it had its roots in video game culture, Gamergate became a flashpoint for discussion about gendered online harassment, including on platforms like Wikipedia. In the end, the Wikipedia Arbitration Committee (Arbcom) sanctioned several editors on both sides over edits to the "Gamergate controversy" article—a contentious decision within the community. Public statements were issued by the Wikimedia Foundation, by two of the editors who were brought before the Arbcom, and in an unusual instance, by the Arbcom itself. As Michael Mandiberg wrote in *Social Text*,

what's frustrating is that Wikipedia's ArbCom is structured to act in the letter of the law but maybe not the spirit, and as such, is ripe for abuse by the kind of process we've seen take place. The principles on which Wikipedia is founded assume everyone is acting in good faith, and seem unprepared for the Men's Rights Activism spawned from Reddit, 4chan, and 8chan. It's an example of what Astra Taylor says, that "open" in no way means "equal."<sup>11</sup>

Wikipedia's idealistic community guidelines—"be bold" and "assume good faith"—do not take into account the pervasiveness of online harassment and how it plays out in the lives of women, people of color, people

with disabilities, LGBTQIA people, and folks from other marginalized communities.

Harassment often bleeds from one platform to another, from online to “in real life,” and Wikipedia is no exception.<sup>12</sup> According to a 2017 Pew poll, 41 percent of Americans claim they’ve been harassed online while nearly one-in-five “have been subjected to particularly severe forms of harassment online, such as physical threats, harassment over a sustained period, sexual harassment or stalking.” Further, one in ten note having been targeted due to their physical appearance, race, or gender, and “although most people believe harassment is often facilitated by the anonymity that the internet provides, these experiences can involve acquaintances, friends or even family members.”<sup>13</sup>

We have experienced several forms of harassment since founding Art+Feminism from both within and outside the Wikipedia community. The largest targeted Twitter campaign of harassment came after the Museum of Modern Art created a Facebook event page for the live stream of our 2017 edit-a-thon opening panel about internet activism, featuring writer Joanne McNeil, Data & Society Research Institute Fellow Zara Rahman, and Kimberly Drew, curator and creator of the Black Contemporary Art Tumblr.<sup>14</sup> This was largely the result of men’s rights activists (MRAs) bandwagoning on an initial comment by an influential MRA activist.<sup>15</sup> We, as individuals, luckily remained largely unscathed because we operate all our social media under the collective identity of Art+Feminism. But, as is often the case with online harassment, no one was held accountable for the tweetstorm.

We have been subject to personal attacks and individual harassment from within the Wikipedia community, however. The most notable case involved an editor with whom we had previously worked.<sup>16</sup> Over two years, this individual posted hostile comments on various Art+Feminism pages, including comments on grant proposals which elicited formal warnings of “uncivil” behavior. They attacked Art+Feminism and individuals involved with the project on Twitter, repeatedly misgendering team members and, in some cases, making claims about people in ways that were potentially harmful to their employment. They also actively interfered with our organizational efforts, including nominating training materials for deletion on procedural grounds days before our campaign was set to start and sabotaging other efforts across Wikimedia platforms, including Wikidata. They were eventually banned, but only after multiple reports over the course

of two years from both within and outside the Art+Feminism collective. This was the culmination of two exhausting years of documentation and repeated reports on top of the usual affective labor of organizing.

The amount of labor it takes to report these types of experiences, in addition to the harm of the abuse itself, can be a major reason people do not continue to work on Wikipedia projects. A recent *New York Times* article highlighted the abuse experienced by LGBTQIA-identified individuals on Wikipedia. One interviewee, Pax Ahimsa Gethen, a trans male Wikipedian who was harassed for several months, reported their harasser posting their deadname as well as telling them they were “unloved” and belonged in an internment camp. Gethen is quoted as saying, “I’m not getting paid for this. Why should I volunteer my time to be abused?”<sup>17</sup>

Further, we’ve experienced verbal or physical harassment at every national or global Wikipedia-related event we have attended. We have reported these incidents to the conference organizer and/or to the Wikimedia Foundation’s Trust and Safety team if they are present. With one exception, these complaints did not result in action taken during these conferences. We found it particularly galling at Wikimania 2017 that, during his keynote address, Jimmy Wales claimed that Wikipedia was great at dealing with harassment.<sup>18</sup>

Partially in response to these experiences, we created our own more inclusive and specific Safe Space/Brave Space Policy to hold all of our organizers accountable to our shared values.<sup>19</sup> This policy was a collective effort based on our informed experiences across various intersections of identity. It was created in collaboration with organizers around the world, and we wish to acknowledge that we do this work in solidarity with a wide-reaching feminist network. One of the key components of our Safe Space/Brave Space policy is to “confront harassment and reduce harm.” This, in and of itself, is labor that often results in further alienation or “outsider status.” As the #metoo movement and Black Lives Matter has shown, the silence around discrimination and violence against marginalized communities is the status quo. What does it mean to speak out? In many cases, it means making yourself vulnerable to further harassment as well as alienation from communities you participate in.

In the process of writing this book chapter, Art+Feminism (along with some other Wikipedia-related organizations) called out an alleged instance of personal and physical abuse that others in the community had brought

to our attention. Our process of calling out was both intentional and careful, with the primary goal of causing less harm to everyone involved. Necessarily, this kind of work requires hours of discussion and negotiation that is both exhausting and invisible. We reached out to other community members who, we thought, might have similar reservations about participating in a project with someone accused of abuse, and some chose to join in solidarity. This work was exhausting and potentially harmful to a project we all cared deeply for but was a necessary move to “confront harassment and reduce harm” in our community.

Lam et al.’s presentation at the 7th International Symposium on Wikis and Open Collaboration was aptly titled “WP:Clubhouse?” using Wikipedia’s policy language to suggest that community is, perhaps, the wrong term to describe a group that polices its boundaries often along race and gender lines.<sup>20</sup> To echo their question: are we talking about community, or are we talking about a clubhouse? This brings us back to the title of this chapter: “what we talk about when we talk about community.” How is Wikipedia “open” if there are so many barriers to entry for women, LGBTQIA-identified folks, and people of color?

### **Whose Labor Is Recognized as Labor? Can a Community Focus on Content Creation Recognize the Gendered Labor Required to Reproduce Community?**

Wikipedia is a community that focuses on numbers: number of articles created, number of citations, and so on. While as of 2019, the Wikimedia Foundation counts 36,421,998 Wikipedia accounts, only 130,136 are considered “active editors.”<sup>21</sup> When Larry Sanger and Jimmy Wales founded Wikipedia in 2001, its growth was rapid, with over twenty thousand articles in its first year and a growing community of “Wikipedians” who worked collectively to write and edit the content. In the mid-2000s, however, the site’s popularity boomed and criticism of vandalism on Wikipedia became a mainstream debate.<sup>22</sup> Established editors responded by creating an elaborate set of policies and guidelines for participation as well as automated bots to handle routine checks for grammar and citations, among other things. As Tom Simonite has noted, “But those tougher rules and the more suspicious atmosphere that came along with them had an unintended consequence. Newcomers to Wikipedia making their first, tentative edits—and

the inevitable mistakes—became less likely to stick around. Being steam-rollered by the newly efficient, impersonal editing machine was no fun.”<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, a comprehensive study of the longevity of newcomers to Wikipedia has found that new editors are far more likely to have their initial edits rejected and leave than their predecessors in the early days of Wikipedia were.<sup>24</sup> And, another study has shown that women are even more likely to have their edits reverted than men and less likely to come back.<sup>25</sup> This suggests that helping new users feel comfortable editing on Wikipedia will require a huge effort to change these norms.

What counts as labor on Wikipedia is a fraught question. The creation of the encyclopedia itself and its various offshoots (Wikimedia Commons, Wikidata, etc.) all rely on volunteer labor. Drawing on the research of Tiziana Terranova, who has argued that social media and crowdsourcing platforms are for all intents and purposes “digital sweatshops,” Dorothy Howard, lead co-organizer for the 2015 campaign, has argued that Wikipedia’s reliance on unpaid labor blurs the line between information activism and digital labor.<sup>26</sup> But it is clear that in the eyes of the on-wiki community, the labor of love that is Wikipedia is one that is based on content creation, not on community building.

In 2016, the Wikipedia community was asked to weigh in on global metrics, which included the active editor counts. We argued that these events do not accurately measure the success of individuals or projects because they relied solely on Wikipedia edit counts, negating the other community-building work of catalyzing other important Wiki projects like AfroCROWD and holding edit-a-thons with a global reach. It is worth quoting our feedback at length here:

We would like to reconsider the definition of a retained active editor. At present, a retained active editor is defined as a user that has made at least 5 edits per month in article space, for a period of 6 or 12 months. All three of the lead organizers for Art+Feminism do not qualify as “retained active editors” over a 12 or 6 month period in its current definition. *Think about that.* We are metapedians who spend much/most of our time in meta, AfD [articles for deletion], meetup and talk pages; we compose longer texts (like this) collaboratively in a word doc or make all our edits in our sandbox like good Wikipedians, then paste them into articles space and only get credit for one edit; we spend many hours a week organizing off-wiki; we go to Wikicon and give presentations that demonstrate leadership and which others learn from. None of this “counts.” Furthermore, the annual schedules of academia and the NY art world means that two out of the three of us take much



of August off from as much responsibility as we can, Wikipedia included. It strikes us that this resembles a re-inscription of a traditional hierarchy of gendered labor. This facilitation is the invisible labor of “making of the home”—we are enabling the legible work of other people. This work is erased as legitimate labor. The historical campaign *Wages for Housework* argued that housework was not understood as legitimate work or labor because it is not remunerated.<sup>27</sup>

In response to our feedback, the Wikimedia Foundation eventually changed its global metrics, removing the retained active editor requirement.<sup>28</sup>

Both Howard and Mandiberg have alluded to the emotional or affective labor of community organizing on Wikipedia, with Mandiberg specifically referring to it as “the labor of being afraid.”<sup>29</sup> As we’ve made clear in our discussions of harassment on Wikipedia, organizing a feminist editing collective requires a lot of emotional labor. But that labor is also on top of other kinds of immaterial labor—such as community organizing, peer education, social media production, event organizing, and so forth—that are involved in organizing a month of edit-a-thons each year that, on average, includes around three hundred events all over the world, with over four thousand participants editing or creating twenty-five thousand articles on Wikipedia.<sup>30</sup> Producing social media posts, managing volunteers and staff, and securing grant funding to pay for childcare, coffee, and snacks and then processing those reimbursement payments for events in countries all over the world (with their varied banking requirements) is the labor of organizing that so often keeps the Art+Feminism team from the labor of editing. And this labor is gendered.<sup>31</sup>

### **What Happens When Thousands of New Contributors Contribute Tens of Thousands of New Articles? How Does the Community React?**

As researchers have shown, the Wikipedia community has grown increasingly inhospitable to new editors.<sup>32</sup> This has had a great impact on the Art+Feminism project which, from its genesis, relied heavily on the openness of Wikipedia. Our approach has always been to encourage users to “be bold” and participate in the world’s largest online encyclopedia, a tool we all use daily. And, as we stated earlier, this mantle was taken seriously. With over six years, 1,100 events, fourteen thousand participants, and fifty-eight thousand articles, we are one of the longest-running and largest edit-a-thons in Wikipedia history. And it is also true that much of this work is

not being done by what we traditionally refer to as Wikipedians, although we encourage all of the artists, activists, writers, educators, and librarians who are organizing and editing to see themselves as “Wikipedians,” even if the community doesn’t necessarily see them as such.

Because we encourage new editors to participate in Wikipedia, we understand that this will necessarily mean good faith errors. Anyone who teaches knows that learning requires mistakes. Over the years we’ve implemented a rigorous monitoring process to help new editors ensure that their articles don’t get deleted or help explain why a particular article isn’t considered notable within Wikipedia’s guidelines. We encourage first time editors to improve one of the five thousand pages we track via Wikidata<sup>33</sup> and specifically direct them to the seven hundred English and fifty Spanish articles from this set which also have key article improvement alert templates, indicating they need further citations or links or have questionable notability; we direct people who want to make new pages to the Art+Feminism Draft Template;<sup>34</sup> and we encourage event organizers to vet articles before moving them from Draft to Article space. We use the Programs and Events Dashboard to track the alerts on all of the articles edited at our events; we post articles that have been proposed for deletion—through PROD (proposed deletion) or AfD (article for deletion)—to a Slack channel called #firebrigade where experienced editors can review these articles and either improve them or support their deletion when warranted. During the 2018 campaign, we tracked these deleted articles and determined that only 0.67 percent of our new articles were deleted. This is quite different from the 80 percent deletion rate that is often discussed as the percentage of new articles deleted in “New pages patrol.”<sup>35</sup>

Despite all of this, our articles are challenged, our grant reports questioned, and worse. In one instance early on, an organizer in Australia didn’t heed our recommendation to seek out an experienced Wikipediaian. We found out via an experienced editor who posted a skeptical email to a large Wikimedia mailing list; we handled the situation, and within twenty-four hours had found an editor to help with the edit-a-thon. This should have ended there, but instead editors went on to comment on organizers’ personal social media pages about the “mess” we had made in Australia, and a number of event organizers canceled their events due to what they felt was abusive behavior from these Wikipediaians; later these same Wikipediaians made similar comments on our meta pages. Again, we ask: who is the

Wikipedia community for? If it's only for those who *already* understand the Byzantine system of guidelines, policies, and social hierarchies, how can it possibly be welcoming to newcomers?

### **What Are the Challenges of Building Communities That Traverse Geographies and Languages?**

The global nature of a campaign like Art+Feminism is one of its greatest strengths and greatest challenges. For example, the dynamics of managing a gender-gap-related edit-a-thon are radically different in a context where there are no experienced Wikipedians available to attend events in person, where there are no “reliable” published sources on women artists’ lives and works, and where there is a considerable digital literacy gap or where it is unsafe for people to gather in public places. All of these are or have been factors in organizing events in Latin America, for example.

Siko Bouterse and Anasuya Sengupta have spoken eloquently on how the Wikipedia community is, at best, not prepared and, at worst, hostile to the concept of local and indigenous knowledge(s):

Wikipedians—particularly on the English Wikipedia—have found it hard to accept sources that are local publications in non-familiar languages, and certainly, to accept and accommodate the fact that the majority of the world’s knowledge (especially but not only in the global South) is oral, not written in published material. Google estimated a few years ago that the total number of published books in the world is about 130 million in 480 languages, but there are over 7000 languages and dialects in the world. “Oral citations”—a concept first explored by Achal Prabhala and his team in a fascinating 2011 film called *People Are Knowledge*—are not yet given credence within the community of editors.<sup>36</sup>

Early on in Art+Feminism’s development, we established a Regional Ambassador program so that we could adopt a more localized and decentralized model of organizing. The Regional Ambassador program consists of a network of activists, academics, and art workers who are familiar with the Wikipedia environment and who enable fluid and close dialogue between the campaign and the hundreds of organizers around the world. Currently, the program includes both an informal network of volunteers as well as a more formal network of organizers in Africa, Latin America, the United States, Canada, Europe, and Asia who coordinate directly with the core leadership team. These organizers typically participate in or contribute to

the creation of support networks among art workers, art institutions, feminist activists, and Wikipedians that are either regional or based on a shared language or culture, such as Lusophone or Latin America and Spain.

Working globally introduces variables of geography and language as well as the challenge of negotiating the dynamics and tensions between the Global North and the Global South. The hundreds of organizers and participants come from diverse cultural, geographic, economic, and educational backgrounds. We are well aware of this diversity and have tried to adapt to it to the best of our abilities. For example, we have spent significant time rewriting and redesigning training materials to make the content more accessible, and this includes integrating translation to multiple languages into our workflow as a permanent practice.<sup>37</sup> Further, bringing voices from the Global South directly into the leadership collective has greatly affected the way that we organize.<sup>38</sup> Early on in Art+Feminism's organizing, we realized that our leadership collective and materials weren't speaking directly to all the communities we were working with. So, in response, we commissioned a diversity audit and have based much of our work since then on the recommendations.<sup>39</sup>

Earlier we mentioned how the Wikipedia community values the number of edits made by users above all and that users who create content develop clout within the community. Given that the research that indicates that the average active editor of Wikipedia is an educated white cisgender man living in the Global North, this means that the editors with the most clout tend to be educated white cisgender men living in the Global North.<sup>40</sup> This is particularly relevant because it makes it difficult to increase the presence of people from the Global South, especially those facing structural violence or segregation. This brings up the question: when thousands of women and other marginalized communities take on the challenge of participating in a voluntary platform, how can we support and do justice to their work?

We've already talked about the harassment the core team has experienced in our work, but this is made exponentially more complicated in other geographical and language Wikipedia contexts. Art+Feminism organizers have had multiple run-ins with Italian Wikipedians, for example. One of our organizers and a seasoned Wikipedian, Camelia Boban, recently told the *New York Times* that a user once publicly insinuated that she was a prostitute.<sup>41</sup> Another organizer has written extensively about her negative experience working on Italian Wikipedia for Italian *VICE*.<sup>42</sup> In this instance,

the organizer curated a list of well-known video game and digital media artists whose pages were all subsequently deleted on notability grounds, despite the artists having work shown in the Whitney Biennial, among other major exhibitions, and works in major permanent collections.<sup>43</sup> These deletions included nitpicking language typical of Wikipedians wielding guidelines and policies to dissuade new editors from participating, also known as “wikilawyerling.”<sup>44</sup> And when these editors were asked in good faith to help edit the article instead of deleting it, they declined.<sup>45</sup> In this case, it was clear that the editors recommending the deletion had far less knowledge about the subject matter than the original editors.

We have observed this type of behavior on talk and AfD pages across multiple language Wikipedias; we’ve experienced similar arguments on English and Spanish Wikipedia, for example. We would argue that this kind of behavior speaks volumes to the ways the insider knowledge of Wikipedia communities and discourses can be used to create boundaries that are inaccessible to women and other marginalized communities. In instances of harassment on other language Wikipedias, unfortunately, the onus is almost entirely on our Regional Ambassador to do all the editing and affective labor involved as our core organizing committee usually cannot intervene due to language barriers. Where possible, we have also relied on informal translations and interventions by other members of our collective with the requisite language skills.

Unfortunately, truly building out a support and safety net for our organizers in local disputes is something that will require greater bandwidth and capacity than we currently have. More importantly, it is work that would require major structural changes within the larger Wikipedia community. It would require a community that is not so white and male. It would require safe and brave space guidelines and avenues for applying them. It would require diversity and equity work from both the Wikipedia Foundation and the community. As long as editors are suspicious of new users, women, people of color, LGBTQIA people, and editors from the Global South will continue to feel unwelcome. In the words of our former director, McKensie Mack, on the experience of working on a Wikipedia-related project as someone who identifies as queer, black, and nonbinary: “It’s really important to note that the community is transphobic and homophobic. It’s also extremely closed to race and gender equity. Going to conferences and being treated like a doll was terrible. The Art+Feminism collective made me feel

welcome, but it was basically you all and nobody else. And that was definitely a huge problem."<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we've mapped out a veritable hellscape of microaggressions within the Wikipedia community. However, it's important to note that we—along with thousands of others—continue to participate in the Wikipedia project and community because we believe in it. We're critical because we are, above all, invested. Indeed, we have always believed and continue to believe that Wikipedia has radical feminist potential. In the words of Diana Maffia,

the Wikipedia initiative is in perfect harmony with the critical feminist project: to take knowledge out of the cloisters, to encourage a collective form of knowledge production, to equate voices to give an opportunity to all proposals, to establish collective forms of correction and not under the undisputed authority of an expert, to install new themes, to influence the agendas of knowledge, to establish links between science, technology and society, to democratize access to knowledge and to allow the public appropriation of its results.<sup>47</sup>

We have seen this ethic modeled within the community as well. We've received wonderful support from the Wikimedia Foundation's Community Resources Team, both financially and emotionally. Art+Feminism would not have been successful without their mentorship. We've also received incredible support from amazing Wikipedians in New York, across the United States, and around the world, without whom the expansion of this project wouldn't have been possible. Many of these people have been with us since day one and continue to attend events and help organize every year.

As Art+Feminism looks forward, the project will bring more voices into our leadership collective in the same way we've tried to bring more voices into Wikipedia at large. As the leadership collective necessarily becomes more diverse, it will better support our regional organizers and also model Wikipedia's radical intersectional feminist potential. As organizers, we do this for a particular moment: that instance where a new editor realizes that their knowledge counts and that they can shape the way other people learn. Watching women, people of color, LGBTQIA folks, and people from varied other marginalized identities feel empowered to share their research and skills is always rewarding. We strongly believe that Wikimedia's future

depends on becoming a place where *all* members of the community are recognized and valued.

### Notes

1. See, for example, Andrea Peterson, “Happy Ada Lovelace Day! Go Add Some Nerdy Ladies to Wikipedia,” *The Washington Post*, October 15, 2013, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2013/10/15/happy-ada-lovelace-day-go-add-some-nerdy-ladies-to-wikipedia/>.

2. “Room for Debate: Where Are the Women in Wikipedia,” *The New York Times*, February 2, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia>.

3. Amanda Filipacchi, “Wikipedia’s Sexism Toward Female Novelists,” *The New York Times*, April 24, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/28/opinion/sunday/wikipedias-sexism-toward-female-novelists.html>

4. For example, see: G.F., “The Economist Explains: Who Really Runs Wikipedia,” *The Economist*, May 6, 2013, <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2013/05/05/who-really-runs-wikipedia>; Amanda Filipacchi, “Sexism on Wikipedia Is Not the Work of a ‘Single Misguided Editor’: It’s a Widespread Problem,” *The Atlantic*, April 30, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/saxes/archive/2013/04/sexism-on-wikipedia-is-not-the-work-of-a-single-misguided-editor/275405/>; Deanna Zandt, “Yes, Wikipedia is Sexist—That’s Why It Needs You,” *Forbes*, April 26, 2013, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/deannazandt/2013/04/26/yes-wikipedia-is-sexist-thats-why-it-needs-you/#541c49b364bf>.

5. See Wikipedia, s.v. “Category: American Women Novelists,” s.v. “Categories for Discussion: Log April 24. 2013,” last modified December 4, 2013, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Categories\\_for\\_discussion/Log/2013\\_April\\_24#Category:American\\_women\\_novelists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Categories_for_discussion/Log/2013_April_24#Category:American_women_novelists); Wikipedia, s.v. “Category Talk: American Women Novelists,” last modified December 27, 2015, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category\\_talk:American\\_women\\_novelists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category_talk:American_women_novelists).

6. We should note here that, before the release of the Programs and Events Dashboard ([https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Programs\\_%26\\_Events\\_Dashboard](https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Programs_%26_Events_Dashboard)), tracking numbers of articles created and editors attending relied on self-reporting which, for new editors and organizers, was not always a given.

7. Jacqueline Mabey and Michael Mandiberg, “How we organized a 1500 person meetup (and you could too)” (lecture, WikiConference North America, Washington, DC, October 10, 2015), [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:How\\_we\\_organized\\_a\\_1500\\_person\\_meetup\\_\(and\\_you\\_could\\_too\)\\_at\\_WikiConference\\_USA\\_2015.webm](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:How_we_organized_a_1500_person_meetup_(and_you_could_too)_at_WikiConference_USA_2015.webm).

8. View the Facebook post and the discussion thread here: Julie Perini, "Portland pals: let's talk," Facebook, January 8, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/events/1391632164423119/permalink/1393456370907365/>.

9. R. Stuart Geiger, "Summary Analysis of the 2017 GitHub Open Source Survey," *arXiv*, June 8 2017, <https://arxiv.org/abs/1706.02777>.

10. Whitney E. Powell, D. Scott Hunsinger, B. Dawn Medlin, "Gender Differences within the Open Source Community: An Exploratory Study," *Journal of Information Technology Management* 21, no. 4, (2010): 31.

11. Michael Mandiberg, "The Affective Labor of Wikipedia: GamerGate, Harassment, and Peer Production," *SocialText Online*, February 1, 2015, <http://socialtextjournal.org/affective-labor-of-wikipedia-gamergate>; Astra Taylor, "The Internet's Destructive Gender Gap: Why the Web Can't Abandon Its Misogyny," *Salon*, April 10, 2014, [https://www.salon.com/2014/04/10/the\\_internets\\_destructive\\_gender\\_gap\\_why\\_the\\_web\\_cant\\_abandon\\_its\\_misogyny\\_partner/](https://www.salon.com/2014/04/10/the_internets_destructive_gender_gap_why_the_web_cant_abandon_its_misogyny_partner/).

12. The Wikimedia Foundation Support & Safety Team, *Harassment Survey 2015 Results Report* (San Francisco, CA: Wikimedia Foundation, 2015), 15, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/52/Harassment\\_Survey\\_2015\\_-\\_Results\\_Report.pdf](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/52/Harassment_Survey_2015_-_Results_Report.pdf).

13. Duggan Maeve, *Online Harassment 2017* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, July 11, 2017), <https://www.pewinternet.org/2017/07/11/online-harassment-2017/>.

14. Kimberly Drew, Joanne McNeil, and Zara Rahman, "2018 Wikipedia Edit-a-thon: Art+Feminism | MoMA LIVE," YouTube, video, 1:05:26, March 11, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-ADrn3UzHk>.

15. View the Twitter discussion thread here: MoMA, The Museum of Modern Art (@MuseumModernArt), "Join us 3/11 for Wikipedia Edit-a-thon: Art+Feminism! Begins 10am w/@jomc, @zararah & @museummammy. Info & RSVP: [http://mo.ma/wikipedia\\_rsvp](http://mo.ma/wikipedia_rsvp)," Twitter, March 8, 2017, 12:14 p.m., <https://twitter.com/MuseumModernArt/status/839524754038075393>.

16. It is important to note that we use gender neutral pronouns throughout this chapter but it should be acknowledged that abuse within the Wikipedia community (and online in general) is often cast as being gendered, but in many cases it can also cross gender lines.

17. Julia Jacobs, "Wikipedia Isn't Officially a Social Network. But the Harassment Can Get Ugly," *The New York Times*, April 8, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/08/us/wikipedia-harassment-wikimedia-foundation.html>.

18. For our immediate response see Art+Feminism (@artandfeminism), "To @jimmy\_wales it was an #artandfeminism editathon at MoMA & no, Wikipedia is not great at dealing with harassment," Twitter, August 13, 2017, 4:42p.m., <https://twitter.com/artandfeminism/status/896849435879247872/photo/1>.



19. Wikipedia, s.v. “Wikipedia: Meetup Page: Art+Feminism Safe Space/Brave Space Policy,” last modified December 27, 2015, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Meetup/ArtandFeminism/Safespacepolicy>.
20. Shyong (Tony) K. Lam, Anuradha Uduwage, Zhenhua Dong, Shilad Sen, David R. Musicant, Loren Terveen, and John Riedl, “WP:Clubhouse? An Exploration of Wikipedia’s Gender Imbalance,” in *WikiSym ’11: Proceedings of the 7th International Symposium on Wikis and Open Collaboration* (New York: ACM, 2011), 1–10.
21. Wikipedia, s.v. “Wikipedia: Wikipedians,” last modified May 9, 2019, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedians>.
22. Tom Simonite, “The Decline of Wikipedia,” *MIT Technology Review*, October 23, 2013, <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/S20446/the-decline-of-wikipedia/>.
23. Simonite, “The Decline of Wikipedia.”
24. A. Halfaker, R. S. Gieger, J. Morgan, and J. Riedl, “The Rise and Decline of an Open Collaboration System: How Wikipedia’s Reaction to Sudden Popularity Is Causing Its Decline,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 57, no. 5 (2013): 664–688, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764212469365>.
25. Lam et al., “WP:Clubhouse?”
26. Dorothy Howard, “Labor and the New Encyclopedia,” *Dis Magazine*, March 2015.
27. Meta-Wiki, s.v. “Talk: Global Metrics/Review,” last modified August 2, 2016, [https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Talk:Global\\_metrics/Review](https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Talk:Global_metrics/Review).
28. See Meta-Wiki, s.v. “Talk: Global Metrics/Review”; Wikimedia, s.v. “Grant Metrics Instead of Global Metrics,” s.v. “Grants: IdeaLab: Redesigning Global Metrics and Its Support,” last modified September 14, 2016, [https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Grants:IdeaLab/Redesigning\\_Global\\_Metrics\\_%26\\_its\\_support/Outcome#Grant\\_metrics\\_instead\\_of\\_Global\\_Metrics](https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Grants:IdeaLab/Redesigning_Global_Metrics_%26_its_support/Outcome#Grant_metrics_instead_of_Global_Metrics).
29. Mandiberg, “The Affective Labor of Wikipedia.”
30. Meta-Wiki, s.v. “Art+Feminism Simple Annual Planning Grant Midpoint Report 2018–2019,” last modified June 3, 2019, [https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Art%2BFeminism\\_User\\_Group/Reporting/MidpointReport2018-2019](https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Art%2BFeminism_User_Group/Reporting/MidpointReport2018-2019).
31. See Brooke Erin Duffy, *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017) for an analysis of how the labor of social media production is gendered; see Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2014) for essential writing on the gendering of reproductive labor.
32. Halfaker et al., “The Rise and Decline of an Open Collaboration System.”
33. Wikidata Query Service, query for all items with “on focus list of Wikimedia project (P5008)” of “Art+Feminism (Q24909800),” <https://w.wiki/4mA>.

34. Wikipedia, s.v. "Use the Draft Template," s.v. "Wikipedia: Meetup/ArtAndFeminism," last modified April 4, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Meetup/ArtAndFeminism#Use\\_the\\_Draft\\_Template](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Meetup/ArtAndFeminism#Use_the_Draft_Template).
35. Meta-Wiki, s.v. "Less than 1% of All Articles Were Deleted," s.v. "Art+Feminism User Group/Reporting/MidpointReport2017-2018," last modified June 3, 2019, [https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Art%2BFeminism\\_User\\_Group/Reporting/MidpointReport2017-2018#Less\\_than\\_1%\\_of\\_all\\_articles\\_were\\_Deleted](https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Art%2BFeminism_User_Group/Reporting/MidpointReport2017-2018#Less_than_1%_of_all_articles_were_Deleted).
36. Flavia Fascendi, "Reshaping the Internet for Women," *Association for Progressive Communication*, January 9, 2017, <https://www.apc.org/en/news/reshaping-internet-women>.
37. Meta-Wiki, s.v. "Translated Materials," s.v. "Art+Feminism User Group/Reporting/MidpointReport2018-2019," last modified June 3, 2019, [https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Art%2BFeminism\\_User\\_Group/Reporting/MidpointReport2018-2019#Translated\\_materials](https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Art%2BFeminism_User_Group/Reporting/MidpointReport2018-2019#Translated_materials).
38. Meta-Wiki, s.v. "Art+Feminism User Group/Planning/Staffing2018," last modified August 14, 2018, [https://meta.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=Art%2BFeminism\\_User\\_Group/Planning/Staffing2018](https://meta.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=Art%2BFeminism_User_Group/Planning/Staffing2018).
39. Alice Backer, Sheetal Prajapati, and Marin Watts, *Art+Feminism Diversity Audit* (2016), <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/07/2016ArtAndFeminismDiversityReview.pdf>.
40. Mani Pande, "Wikipedia Editors Do It for Fun: First Results of Our 2011 Editor Survey," *Wikimedia Foundation* (blog), June 10, 2011, <https://blog.wikimedia.org/2011/06/10/wikipedia-editors-do-it-for-fun-first-results-of-our-2011-editor-survey/>.
41. Jacobs, "Wikipedia Isn't Officially a Social Network."
42. Annamaria Andrea Vitali, "Come ho cercato di combattere il sessismo su Wikipedia in italiano," *VICE: Motherboard*, June 27, 2017, <https://www.vice.com/it/article/7xz5vq/come-ho-cercato-di-combattere-il-sessismo-di-wikipedia-italia>.
43. Vitali, "Come ho cercato di combattere il sessismo su Wikipedia in italiano."
44. Wikipedia, s.v. "Wikipedia: Wikilawyering," last modified May 11, 2019, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikilawyering>.
45. Vitali, "Come ho cercato di combattere il sessismo su Wikipedia in italiano."
46. McKensie Mack, personal interview by Siân Evans, June 7, 2019.
47. Diana Maffia, "Género y lengua. Dos brechas clave en el ámbito de la ciencia y la tecnología," in *La cuestión de género en el mundo digital. Wikipedia y otras comunidades. Conferencia Wikigénero*, ed. Juan Nadalini (Buenos Aires: Wikimedia Argentina, 2014), 8, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1d/La\\_cuesti%C3%B3n\\_de\\_g%C3%A9nero\\_en\\_el\\_mundo\\_digital.\\_Wikipedia\\_y\\_otras\\_comunidades..pdf](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1d/La_cuesti%C3%B3n_de_g%C3%A9nero_en_el_mundo_digital._Wikipedia_y_otras_comunidades..pdf).

This is a section of [doi:10.7551/mitpress/12366.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/12366.001.0001)

# Wikipedia @ 20

## Stories of an Incomplete Revolution

**Edited by: Joseph Reagle, Jackie Koerner**

### Citation:

*Wikipedia @ 20: Stories of an Incomplete Revolution*

Edited by: Joseph Reagle, Jackie Koerner

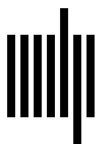
DOI: 10.7551/mitpress/12366.001.0001

ISBN (electronic): 9780262360593

Publisher: The MIT Press

Published: 2020

The open access edition of this book was made possible by generous funding and support from Knowledge Unlatched, Northeastern University, and the Wikimedia Foundation



The MIT Press

© 2020 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

This work is subject to a Creative Commons CC BY-NC 4.0 license.  
Subject to such license, all rights are reserved.



The open access edition of this book was made possible by generous funding from Knowledge Unlatched, Northeastern University Communication Studies Department, and Wikimedia Foundation.



This book was set in Stone Serif and Stone Sans by Westchester Publishing Services.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Reagle, Joseph, editor. | Koerner, Jackie, editor.

Title: Wikipedia @ 20 : stories of an incomplete revolution / edited by  
Joseph M. Reagle and Jackie Koerner.

Other titles: Wikipedia at 20

Description: Cambridge, Massachusetts : The MIT Press, [2020] |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020000804 | ISBN 9780262538176 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Wikipedia--History.

Classification: LCC AE100 .W54 2020 | DDC 030--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020000804>