

16 Toward a Wikipedia For and From Us All

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To build a Wikipedia that reflects the full breadth and depth of humanity, we must deconstruct the myths that allow misogyny, racism, colonialism, and other forms of oppression to flourish in our communities and build new practices for the next twenty years. As *Whose Knowledge?* cofounders, we draw on our experiences to offer paths forward.

We love Wikipedia. As readers, and as contributors. But we also hate what it can do to many of us from marginalized communities around the world. Most Wikipedians find it hard to accept that a truly inspiring model of peer production can sit alongside misogyny, racism, and colonialism, but this has indeed been our experience of Wikipedia's first twenty years.

Don't get us wrong; we do love Wikipedia. But for us, our passion for the projects translates into tough love. We believe in speaking up about some of the critical issues of marginalization that have been lurking, invisible, or silenced over the past twenty years. And we believe that acting to change this status quo will make Wikipedia and the Wikimedia movement more powerful and relevant over the next twenty.

We were initially drawn to the encyclopedia and the movement several years ago as feminists, scholars, organizers, and people who are curious about the many worlds we inhabit.

Siko Bouterse is an online community organizer, digital activist, feminist, and mother of a feminist. She grew up in the United States with family spread across three continents in both the Global North and Global South, and her interest in the internet began as a way to connect people across languages, cultures, and spaces. She joined the Wikimedia Foundation in 2011 and became both director of community resources (a temporary state) and a Wikipedian (something she'll probably never get over).

Feeling marginalized and missing from history as a woman, she was first drawn to working on Wikipedia's gender gap. Today Siko continues to use her cisgender white privilege to challenge injustice and inequality of many forms online.

Anasuya Sengupta is an Indian feminist activist and scholar who lives and works across multiple continents and online as a Wikipedian. Having stopped editing after a couple of anonymous improvements in 2006, she joined the Wikimedia Foundation in 2012, became chief grantmaking officer, and then began in earnest to edit and amplify marginalized knowledges on Wikipedia as a volunteer (there's no stopping her now). She's led and supported social justice initiatives in India and the United States, particularly against caste- and sexuality-based discriminations, religious fundamentalisms, and gender-based violence. She acknowledges the multiple and simultaneous positions of power and disempowerment she holds and experiences, especially as an "upper caste" or savarna brown woman from the Global South.

Adele Godoy Vrana is an Afro-Brazilian feminist and social justice activist who joined the Wikimedia movement in 2012. As the former director of strategic partnerships at the Wikimedia Foundation, she led partnership initiatives to help increase access to Wikipedia in the Global South. A Wikipedian against all odds, she decided to stick around to make the point that black women belong everywhere, with or without an edit count. As a marginalized Global South student, she first learned of Wikipedia in her mid-twenties when she could not afford to buy books. She has been grateful to Wikipedia since then while also determined to make the knowledges of people like her visible, heard, and affirmed as part of this movement.

As we became part of the Wikimedia movement, all three of us saw the potential in this huge multilingual, global, online community and project to collect and curate the many textures and layers of human knowledge. Yet we also knew that this potential was far from being met. At the time we joined the Wikimedia Foundation, Wikipedia's gender and Global South gaps were already documented, but very few were actively and collaboratively working to address these gaps. It was still contentious to even mention these gaps in polite Wikipedian society. Much of our time at the Foundation was spent making these issues central to the Wikimedia movement and supporting new initiatives to address them. But perhaps because innovation so rarely comes from an institutional core, by 2015 we'd begun to see that we would be able to make more joyful and transformative

progress in some of these areas from the outside, and eventually each of us left the Wikimedia Foundation to cofound Whose Knowledge?.

Increasingly over the past eight years, many new initiatives, groups, and collaborations have begun to address some of these content and contributor gaps. Today, working to address the gender gap has become a regular part of many Wikimedia chapters' annual programming. Wikimedian user groups have been growing across the Global South. Initiatives like AfroCROWD, Black Lunch Table (chapter 17), Art+Feminism (chapter 15), Wikimujeres, Dalit History Month, and Women in Red are working to create new content and inspire new editors from marginalized communities.

We've been happy to collaborate with a growing number of these groups and initiatives in our shared aim to improve Wikipedia. We began Whose Knowledge? in 2016 to center the knowledge of marginalized communities on the internet. We work as a global campaign with women, people of color, LGBTQIA communities, indigenous peoples, and others from the Global South to build and represent more of all of our knowledge online, including on Wikimedia projects.

We've supported marginalized communities like the Dalits, those formerly and pejoratively known as the "untouchables" in India; Native Americans in the United States; and queer feminists in Bosnia and Herzegovina to add their knowledge to Wikipedia.¹ We've partnered with Wikimedians and feminist organizations around the world to add images of women to Wikimedia Commons and Wikipedia in our annual #VisibleWikiWomen campaign.² And we organized our first "Decolonizing the Internet," convening at Wikimania 2018 in Cape Town, where we brought together activists, artists, scholars, technologists, and Wikipedians.³ Most were women and transgender folks, people of color and people from the Global South, and many were attending a Wikipedia event for the very first time.

Despite these collective efforts, Wikipedia is not yet the Wikipedia the world deserves. Wikipedia's five pillars of free knowledge include that it's written from "a neutral point of view," that people should be treated with "respect and civility," and that it's an "encyclopedia."⁴ These have helped Wikipedia—impossible in theory—be possible in practice. Yet bringing marginalized knowledges to Wikipedia will mean shaking these pillars without destroying its foundations. It will mean challenging Wikipedians to be reflexive about whether the norms, rules, and bureaucracy that made Wikipedia flourish in the last twenty years might kill it over the next twenty.

To do this, we also need to start naming and deconstructing some of the significant myths that are getting in our way and keeping us from building collective bodies of knowledge that truly reflect the full breadth and depth of the world. By naming these myths and sharing ideas for practices to move forward in different ways, we hope to reimagine and redesign Wikipedia as a more equitable, thriving source of knowledge for and from us all.

We begin by sharing the data that shows how urgently we need to examine these myths and by describing the frames that help us understand why they exist and are perpetuated in the first place.

The Data and Frames That Inspire Us

Over half of the world is now online. Nearly half of all women are now online.⁵ Three-fourths of those online today are from the Global South—from Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific Islands.⁶

Yet the internet and Wikipedia—the encyclopedia of the world—don't reflect this reality in either content or contribution. The largest open and free knowledge platform online was begun by white men from North America and Europe as a digital encyclopedia, extending a long enlightenment-driven tradition into cyberspace—as recounted in chapter 19. Today, a relatively privileged minority of the world is still writing about the majority on Wikipedia.

Only 20 percent of the world, primarily white male editors from North America and Europe, edits 80 percent of Wikipedia.⁷ Because who you are impacts what you create, this lack of diversity in contributors leads to lack of diversity in content. Researchers at Oxford Internet Institute recently found that, although Africa has nearly twice the population of Europe, it has only 15 percent the amount of Wikipedia articles.⁸ There are more articles written about Antarctica than most countries in Africa and many in Latin America and Asia. Less than one-fourth of all Wikipedia biographies today represent women in nearly every language version of Wikipedia.⁹

Wikipedia is still missing so much knowledge from marginalized communities around the world, and we don't yet have useful data or research about LGBTQIA, indigenous, or black and brown contributors and content. It may be because we don't often ask these critical questions of who and what is missing or consider the responses to these questions as central to the future of Wikipedia.

Bringing people of color, women, LGBTQIA, indigenous, and Global South folks to Wikipedia and the Wikimedia movement is not only ethical, it is also strategically necessary for survival because that mythical “next billion” readers and potential content creators is already online (and they’re nearly three billion!).¹⁰ An encyclopedia that intends to grow and truly be the sum of all human knowledge needs locally relevant content that connects the majority of the world, not only the minority.

Yet it is not surprising that this is the status quo. Wikipedia reflects the realities of the worlds we live in and the ways in which power and privilege operate today and have operated historically.

This is what feminist activist and scholar Srilatha Batliwala calls direct, indirect, and agenda-setting power.¹¹ *Direct power* is often easily visible and shows who wields control over different resources, spaces, and assets—like the Wikimedia Foundation, which operates the websites. *Agenda-setting power* is often hidden and behind the scenes: it determines who sets the agenda and how; what issues, perspectives, and approaches are amplified, and which are undermined or ignored; what is considered important and what is not. Examples of this might include Wikipedia or Wikimedia Commons admins, who ultimately determine which articles should be kept and which should be deleted or which online campaigns should be promoted and which shouldn’t. Finally, the most insidious power—which operates through the others—is *indirect* or invisible power, which molds the way we think about ourselves and the attitudes and biases we have. Many of these invisible biases are experienced as we argue over what does or does not belong in an encyclopedia.

Power often feels invisible until you begin to see it everywhere. Abuse of power happens when we don’t call it out or talk about what concerns us, including on Wikipedia. As we’ve said elsewhere, we all hold different structures and positions of power and privilege in different contexts. In some situations, we can hold power “over” others in the room or space, and in some contexts, we are the ones who feel disempowered.¹²

Everyone is, or can be, an ally to someone else. We can build a better Wikipedia in solidarity with each other. But the first step is to recognize the myths that are keeping us from working together in productive ways—and then to build new, welcoming, and inclusive practices that will make this happen.

Myths of Wikipedia

Myth: The Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment Invented Science, Technology, and Knowledge at Large

When we talk about the history of science and technology, where do you begin? When someone talks about knowledge, what do you think about? For many white male Wikipedians, science, technology, and knowledge were created in the eighteenth century. The “Enlightenment” era originates the notion of the “encyclopedia” as the repository of all knowledge.

Yet, if you ask these same questions to the three of us, we wouldn’t start there. Anasuya will probably tell you about the ways in which writing and number systems evolved in Sumeria and Akkadia (present day Iran and Iraq), how the representation of the zero traveled from the Indian subcontinent and into the Arab world, and how Aryabhata measured time in the fifth century. Siko is likely to talk about Native American and women’s deep knowledge of the land, plants, animals, and human bodies, which has existed for millennia, as well as the vast knowledge of astronomy, geography, architecture, and horticulture that medieval travelers from North Africa, the Arabian peninsula, and eastern Mediterranean brought to Europe. Adele might tell you that when she thinks about knowledge, she thinks about her grandmother, who had indigenous origins and knew about the native Brazilian plants that could cure many kinds of illness.

All these histories and definitions of knowledge are true. But not all of them are created and known equally. When we think about Wikipedia, the deeper and broader set of histories and knowledges that the three of us represent—the histories and knowledges of the majority of the world—don’t make the cut. They are not considered neutral, notable, or citable enough to be part of the world’s biggest online encyclopedia.

After twenty years of great accomplishments, if Wikipedia truly wants to celebrate, collect, and curate all the knowledge of the world, here’s the place to start: science, technology, and knowledge at large are not an eighteenth-century European creation. Nor is the effort primarily male. The first farmers—most of whom were, as they continue to be, women—were scientists. Ancient African villages were constructed in complex fractal mathematical patterns.¹³ And the oldest existing university in the world was set up in 859 ce by the Arab Muslim woman scholar Fatima Al-Fihri in Morocco.¹⁴

Why do we forget these far richer, broader, more diverse histories of our world and its knowledges? Because the age of “Enlightenment” for Europe was the age of “Empire” for the rest of us: from the eighteenth century onward (and a little earlier for Latin America), the Global South—Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific and Caribbean islands—was assaulted and attacked by European colonizers. With the collusion and cooperation of some of our own people, Global South histories and knowledges, our ways of knowing and being, were either destroyed, marginalized, or made completely invisible to others.

Even unintentionally, have Wikipedians assumed that the only worthwhile histories of science and technology are European and North American? That knowledge itself can only be understood through an eighteenth-century construction of the encyclopedia? If so, are we willing to change our assumptions, policies, and structures to expand the histories and knowledges we once left out? As we celebrate the last twenty years, now seems to be the right time to make the changes that will make Wikipedia a truly global knowledge repository for many more years to come.

Practices to Move Forward

Let's agree that context matters. Everyone has a point of view, and only by bringing many perspectives and interests together can we work toward any form of collective “neutrality.” It's time to stop assuming that white men's knowledge from the Global North is “neutral” while knowledge from marginalized communities is pushing a “point of view.” Your understanding of science, technology, and knowledge depends on who you are, where you come from, and what you look like. And the content you choose to create reflects who is creating it. It's time to consider campaigns like Wiki Loves Pride and Dalit History Month to be just as relevant to building “the sum of all human knowledge” as Wiki Loves Monuments and collaboration drives about railway stations. Each of these reflects the worldviews, interests, and expertise of people who choose to focus on these topics. Wikipedia's ongoing relevance as the largest online repository of knowledge will depend on whether we allow these plural worldviews to coexist or to continue to allow one group to dominate.

Let's expand our understanding of knowledge. So much of the world's knowledge and histories are oral, embodied, and unpublished. What would Wikipedia look like if it made significant space for oral knowledge? If citing oral

testimony from indigenous grandmothers was as normal to Wikipedians as citing the *New York Times*? If we looked at the expertise of a dancer in the same way we understood the expertise of a physicist? Unless we want Wikipedia to continue representing only a very small fraction of the world's knowledge, it's time to develop new strategies and actions to incorporate multiple forms of knowledge.

Let's rethink notability policies. Biographies of people who are women, transgender, black, brown, indigenous, queer, or from the Global South are more likely to be considered not “notable” and thus not included on Wikipedia because marginalized communities are vastly underrepresented in the kinds of published sources that Wikipedians consider “reliable.” Marielle Franco, a queer Black woman from Brazil, was an important politician and human rights activist who had to die to become notable enough for Wikipedia.¹⁵ Going forward, we need to stop applying the same set of norms and rules that keep out your uncle's latest garage band or pyramid scheme to black and brown women and other marginalized communities on Wikipedia. To do this, we need to build collective understanding that systemic bias, marginalization, and oppression is reinforced through Wikipedia's current understanding of reliable sources and notability and make policy changes.

Myth: The Gender Gap Is the Main or Only Diversity Problem to Solve on Wikipedia

Over the past ten years, the Wikimedia movement has begun to recognize the lack of diversity among Wikipedia editors and to discuss it as a challenge for Wikipedia's future.

When we first joined Wikipedia, there were already startling stats that documented the encyclopedia's abysmal gender gap, finding that only one in ten Wikipedians identified as women.¹⁶ Thanks to volunteers, activists, researchers, and allies from around the world, a lot has been done to address this issue.

Fixing the gender gap, however, became the proxy for fixing Wikipedia's diversity problem. While gender is no longer a taboo topic, Wikipedians are often still too uncomfortable to talk openly about racism, decolonization, indigeneity, and homophobia or transphobia.

In practical terms, addressing Wikipedia's diversity problem has meant to create more seats at the table for white women. And strategies that work to bring more cisgender white women and Global North content to the

encyclopedia will not necessarily work for other marginalized communities or for folks who are marginalized in multiple, intersecting ways. The strategies that help a white, able-bodied, cisgendered woman speaking English are unlikely to be as supportive for a queer black woman who is visually impaired and reads Portuguese braille.

The sad reality is that despite all the efforts to address the gender gap, women continue to face the same problems that have been documented for the past decade, including hostile cultures, unwritten or confusingly written rules, and unfair policies that send clear signals for women to stay away. But this should not prevent Wikipedians from embracing complex conversations about intersectional identities and other forms of marginalization. Instead, it should encourage Wikipedians to tackle these systemic issues together.

Wikipedia and other open knowledge spaces need to understand that systems of power and privilege are so hard to dismantle precisely because they encompass multiple forms of oppression and subjugation. Patriarchy, racism, colonization, homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia reinforce and feed off each other. You can't fix your diversity problem while having a single-issue agenda where patriarchy is called out but other systems of power and privilege remain intact.

As we reimagine the Wikipedia we want to build for the future, we'll need to stop compartmentalizing and instead consider how the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, indigeneity, class, language, Global North/Global South differences, and so on act together to influence both participation and content. Equity, rather than a simple understanding of diversity, should be our true goal.

Practices to Move Forward

Let's make sure the conversation about equity and diversity keeps expanding. The Wikimedia movement needs to be talking about race, decolonization, indigeneity, and LGBTQIA issues because ignoring these is not an option. In 2019, Art+Feminism (discussed in chapter 15) expanded their focus to explicitly include gender nonbinary people.¹⁷ That same year, our #VisibleWikiWomen campaign added an explicit focus on #WomenofColors, encouraging participants to especially add images of black, brown, and indigenous cis and transgender women.

Let's deepen and expand Wikipedia research. Research on the gender gap is important, and we're glad to have the data that exists on this topic so far.

Data can help catalyze actions. It would also be very useful to have data about content and contributors from other marginalized communities to help everyone better understand Wikipedia's race gaps, Global South gaps, LGBTQIA gaps, and more.

Let's make sure we're supporting action by resourcing it. Much has been said about the gender gap, but there needs to be substantial investment of resources going toward addressing this gap as well as many other equity issues. The actions of the Wikimedia movement should be at least as loud and strong as its words. The amount of people, money, and time we spend on activities aimed at addressing these gaps and supporting marginalized communities speaks volumes about how much we actually care and how much we'll likely achieve.

Let's make equitable power sharing and resource mobilization our goal instead of just a few diverse seats at the table. In our time at the Wikimedia Foundation, Anasuya and Adele were the only women of color from the Global South in executive positions, while there were a handful of people who looked like Siko in leadership. Numbers are necessary but woefully insufficient. Having a few seats like these did not mean the Foundation was openly discussing and addressing systemic bias and oppression or that we had the power or resources to drive the agenda and change the status quo. Without critical mass, having a few marginalized folks amid a majority who retains power and privilege can work as an excuse to avoid real changes. Inviting marginalized communities in and creating seats at the table is just the beginning. Next, we need to make sure everyone is safe, seen, heard, empowered, and resourced to make significant changes.

Let's work together as allies across multiple intersections. White men, we want you on our side! Our Decolonizing the Internet 2018 conference included people from so many different backgrounds and identities, including white men as allies, precisely because we know that big complex problems require lots of people with different skills and experiences to work together on multiple solutions.

Myth: Violence Is Only Physical. And It's Only Abuse If It's Been Repeated Many Times

People from marginalized communities experience violence every day as they participate in Wikipedia. Sometimes it's so overt and obvious that it does get labeled as harassment, and occasionally the perpetrator of the

harassment is held to some account. However, in most cases, abuse and violence occur more subtly and with different forms of power: verbal, sexual, economic, and so on.¹⁸ Because patriarchy has socialized so many of us around the world today to believe that it's not violence unless a man has punched his wife in the face, many forms of daily violence, including emotional and verbal abuse, are ignored—including on Wikipedia. Over the many years we've lived and worked on Wikipedia, we've seen far too many examples of this.

Deadnaming, a practice of saying or writing a transgender person's old name from before they transitioned, and refusing to use a transgender or nonbinary person's chosen pronouns is a form of violence that happens to trans and nonbinary editors on Wikipedia on a regular basis. It's kept many good trans and nonbinary encyclopedians from coming in and sticking around. When you're already fighting for the right to exist in the larger world, why would you also want to do it as an online hobby?

In 2018 we worked with an LGBTQIA group in Bosnia and Herzegovina who were writing Wikipedia articles about notable queer feminists from the region. When participants went to add six well-sourced biographies of notable writers, artists, historians, and activists to Bosnian Wikipedia, the articles were immediately nominated for deletion. When one article's creator politely asked for a rationale, a deleting administrator suggested that all they needed to do was remove the person's "personal sexual affiliation" from the biography. It's still not OK to be queer in Bosnia, and LGBTQIA folks experience daily violence in the streets of their cities. This violence is perpetuated online by telling a queer person that their article about another queer person (who clearly meets the notability guidelines) can live on Wikipedia if they just don't mention their sexuality.

We have seen a Wikipedia gender gap organizer lose her job because of the actions of a troll who stalked her personal life, looking for ways to bring her down. She stepped away from Wikipedia for a long time as a result. This, too, is a form of violence.

We have seen Dalit women's contributions to Wikipedia being contested at every turn, not because they're vandalizing Wikipedia but because they upset the status quo of how European and upper-caste Wikipedians choose to represent caste on Wikipedia. Because of their status at the bottom of the caste pyramid, Dalits experience daily harassment and violence in real life as well as online.¹⁹ On Wikipedia, a long-time Wikipedian has doggedly rolled

back thoughtfully sourced contributions from Dalit editors and belittled their edits. He has also aggressively asked Dalit History Month organizers to personally identify themselves, despite the common norm of anonymity on Wikipedia. When the harassment was reported to the Wikimedia Foundation's Trust and Safety team, we read an all-too-familiar response that harassment has to be "egregious" in order for action to be taken, and nothing was done.

But what counts as "egregious"? Who decides? Without shared clarity and the centering of marginalized communities in defining the scope and consequences of different forms of violence, everyday forms of violence add up. They add up to an encyclopedia where those with the most privilege, tolerance for aggression, and leisure time continue being seen as our most valued editors while others are made to feel unwelcome in different ways.

So how can we ever hope to address Wikipedia's gender gap or systemic bias issues if we're unwilling to address acts of violence that permeate our online and offline worlds every day?

Practices to Move Forward

Let's speak up, even if it's difficult. Let's call out violence and abuse of all kinds. Let's call in our friends who might not realize they're complicit in perpetuating violence. We need to "call out" violence and abuse by their names. Even if it's not slapping, even if it's not hitting. Even if it's not explicit rape threats. Even if it's "just" once or twice. Let's stop minimizing the everyday violence that folks from marginalized communities experience in our movement and start by recognizing that every time any form of violence happens, it has a cost to the Wikipedia we're trying to build together. We should "call in" folks who may not even realize they are part of perpetuating this violence: all of us bear responsibility to reach out to people with understanding and generosity while challenging them to break the cycles of violence. We can do this quietly; it doesn't always have to be in public, but these conversations need to happen.

If we don't speak up, we're part of the system. If we don't call in our friends who might be adding to the problem, even unintentionally, we're not really being good friends.

In particular, as Wikipedians, we need to recognize that "virtual" violence is still violence. We need to admit that the sometimes hostile, often confrontational nature of on-wiki conversations feel painful and abusive to newbies,

to women and trans folks, to people who speak a different language, to marginalized communities of different kinds. And we know that this nature of violent argumentation can be the starting point for far more disturbing ad hominem attacks, sexist or racist slurs, and various forms of digital doxxing and harassment. At the same time, as Wikipedians, we need to accept that violence in any sphere of our lives needs to be condemned, not condoned, whether it's on a talk page, on a street, at a Wikimedia event, or at home.

Even in the course of writing this chapter, we spoke up about instances of abuse and violence that hadn't occurred on Wikipedia but that we understood to have been perpetrated by a member of the Wikipedia community. We knew that if we chose to consider the abuse as "just personal" and considered it our role to focus on "egregious" incidents that happened only on-wiki or at formal Wikipedia events, our day-to-day lives would be easier. But we know all too well that the personal is deeply political, and spills over into the professional. These artificial separations of "personal," "professional," and "political" hide many forms of silence, especially around abuse and discrimination. We could not dismiss a woman's story of domestic abuse—and continue to be part of building the perpetrator's career within our community—without reflection, recognition, and discussion. So we joined with a larger group of concerned wiki-folks and raised the issue—as thoughtfully as we could—of who we would and would not work with going forward and what behaviors are acceptable in our communities.

Let's do it together. Let's not have those being harassed, abused, or discriminated against be the sole voices challenging violence. We've learned that it's both unfair and ineffective to expect that the person or people who are most affected by violence should be the only ones who speak up, including on Wikipedia. We need others—allies—to step up and support those impacted, especially those who have some privilege themselves. In both the Bosnian and Dalit cases above, having long-time Wikipedians as allies helped content remain on Wikipedia. When well-known editors step up to vote to retain content, improve articles, and support newer editors in crafting arguments using Wikipedia's coded language, this helps to break the cycle of violence.

Myth: A Wikipedian Is Born, Not Made

This saying is particularly brutalizing for someone like Anasuya and her Dalit friends, who come from South Asia, and have to contend with an

oppressive caste system that believes that manual scavengers—those who clean toilets and handle corpses—are born, not made. This is brutalizing for someone like Adele and her Afro-Brazilian friends, whose ancestors were once enslaved and who still need campaigns to prove their lives matter. Or for Siko and her indigenous friends, who grew up in California with narratives of history that dismissed women and portrayed indigenous people as born savages rather than those who resisted brutal colonization.

No, Wikipedians are not born from immaculate conception. Wikipedians and Wikimedians are also a social construct. Yes, editing Wikipedia does need a certain interest in knowledge, a curiosity about the world, and a generosity with sharing it—but those traits are in significant swathes of populations across the world, not simply in the eighty thousand incredible volunteers who currently edit Wikipedia. And yes, organizing Wikimedia events and projects online and offline needs some interest in organizing communities and a generosity in holding them together, but those traits are also in significant groups of people, not just those who currently are at the center of our movement.

Wikipedia volunteers have had to learn how to enter, to participate, and to behave a certain way to be part of our communities and movement. But what happens when you don't know where to start, what to learn, and whom to ask for support? Not everyone even realizes that they *can* edit Wikipedia if they're not already part of a group who know they can. Everyone—particularly those of us who come from marginalized communities—likes and sometimes needs to be invited to join a space or a community to feel welcome and at ease there.

Once you understand you actually can edit, many other barriers remain, including confusing rules, requirements that may not make any sense in the context of your culture's knowledge, and unfriendly editors who will come yell at you on-wiki if you do it wrong.

If you do manage to overcome these barriers and stay for a while, you will then learn that the way other Wikipedians recognize you is solely based on your "edit count," the number of times you publish a change to content. But when you're from a marginalized community, you'll learn that your articles will face extra scrutiny, so you can't publish half-finished things. So women, for example, publish more words in fewer edits than men do.²⁰ Many from the Global South who have unpredictable internet and electricity connections write entire articles offline and upload each article with a

single edit. In other words, if you're sitting in the middle of Maharashtra, you may have created five amazing new articles and organized an offline event to support other new editors to do the same, but you have an edit count of five and will still not be counted as a "real" Wikipedian.

These are not simple hoops one can easily jump through. These are significant foundational barriers for anyone who wants to edit Wikipedia or to become a Wikipedian, especially those marginalized folks who may need extra support to justify spending their limited free time and resources on-wiki.

Practices to Move Forward

Let's move beyond the edit count as a way to honor and acknowledge contributions in the Wikimedia movement. Wikipedia, its sister projects, and our movement needs people who fulfill many different kinds of roles and responsibilities. And if we continue to ask the question (even in our heads) of "what is your edit count?" as the only credible way to assess a person's legitimacy in the movement, we deny significant parts of our movement the respect they deserve for organizing events, managing communities, ensuring local partnerships, and so on. We also shut down the possibility of these people becoming editors, even if their entry points to the movement were not through editing.

Let's translate interest and generosity into practical ways in which people can contribute to Wikipedia. In 2014, African Wikimedians held their first ever gathering, called Wiki Indaba, in Cape Town. At the time, most people, including in our movement, thought that they could never get a significant community together like the Europeans had. In 2018, just four years later, that same group hosted a major global Wikimania in Cape Town, with a clear clarion call for Ubuntu—the southern African philosophy and practice of connected humanity, "I am because we are"—as a way to collectively challenge the knowledge gaps in our projects and communities.

Let's offer help instead of criticism when new editors make mistakes. The best edit-a-thons have experienced editors warmly helping newbies to improve. Rather than showing people all the ways and places they've gone wrong or making them "prove" why their article should not be deleted, what if we jumped in to fix mistakes, add sources, and show them how to make those improvements themselves next time? What if before deciding they were wrong and going onto their talk pages to yell or argue, we stopped

to consider if perhaps they too have experience and expertise we can learn from?

Myth: Ignoring Uncomfortable Things Makes Them Disappear

When we first joined the Wikimedia movement, no one talked about race. No one talked about transgender editors, either. Folks had only just started talking about how Wikipedia was missing women. They had barely started talking about how it was missing contributions from the Global South.

Not talking about race has not fixed racism on Wikipedia. When we joined the Wikimedia Foundation in San Francisco, we were met with puzzled looks when we asked who the African American, indigenous, black, or Latinx editors were in the US Wikipedia community. We didn't encounter them at meetups or conferences; we didn't know their names. Yet we were told over and over again that the North American Wikipedia community was flourishing, possibly even at saturation. How could this be true when significant slices of the US population were not represented as editors or in content?

Ignoring gender-based violence in the Wikimedia movement has also not made it go away. Wikimedia chapters have been brought to a standstill by instances of violence against women from long-time male editors. Women organizers have been discouraged from continuing to lead projects that improve Wikipedia because of harassment and abuse. Trans and nonbinary people don't often stay long on Wikipedia because of the everyday violence they face. Often we become aware of these stories only because we're listening for the whispers and following up with our trusted colleagues to gather more information. All too often nothing happens because silence is considered safest. But when we do nothing, these problems don't go away. They grow bigger, and they happen again, in the same or different contexts.

Practices for Moving Forward

Let's talk about these uncomfortable things together. Through discomfort and a genuine willingness to engage with it comes improvement and transformation. Let's talk about how racism manifests on Wikipedia in obvious and subtle ways. Let's talk about gender-based violence. About transphobia. About different kinds of systemic biases that cause underrepresentation in Wikipedia and its sister projects in both contributors and content. If our projects are truly to be the largest and most useful open knowledge ecosystem, we need to be willing to have the tough conversations about whose knowledge is currently missing and why.

Let's support groups and efforts working on specific knowledge gaps, not troll them. What has helped address gaps in content written by and about black communities on Wikipedia? Projects like AfroCROWD and Black Lunch Table that specifically focus on calling out these gaps and inviting and supporting more black editors to help fill them. Whose Knowledge's #VisibleWikiWomen campaign—in partnership with these groups and others like Women in Red, Wikimujeres, and similar groups across the world—has been able to add the images of nearly five thousand important women to Wikimedia Commons in two years. Yet even as we all get support from a number of Wikimedians, we also receive condemnation, backlash, and threats as we do this work. And even if this form of trolling is by a vocal minority, the fact that the majority doesn't push back explicitly makes this feel like lonely, dangerous, and unacknowledged work. Let's all start speaking up and pushing back in solidarity.

Building For and From Us All

Wikipedia can survive and thrive over the next twenty years and grow into something even more amazing than it already is. It will need us to deconstruct the myths that exclude people and content and limit our potential. It will require us to expand the definitions of who and what belongs on Wikipedia, to work together in mutual respect and solidarity, and to build and share new practices to become the fullest online knowledge repository that we aspire to be. We're looking forward to learning, developing, and exchanging more of these practices with everyone who wishes to be a part of this journey of Ubuntu, of connected humanity. Let's build this together: a Wikipedia for and from us all.

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Wikipedia @ 20

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Edited by: Joseph Reagle, Jackie Koerner

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