

“If You Want to Change the World, Edit Wikipedia”:

Mitigating the Gender Gap and Systemic Bias on Wikipedia

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts in English

in the College of Graduate Studies

University of Idaho

by

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May 2022

ABSTRACT

As a long-time and experienced editor and contributor to the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, the author of this thesis states, “If you want to change the world, edit Wikipedia.” This thesis makes a case for the existence of what has been called the gender gap and systemic bias on Wikipedia, the reality that there are fewer female editors and less content about women, especially biographies, than male editors and content about and for men.

This thesis describes the scope of the problem and describes historical reasons for it, insisting that it has been due to Wikipedia’s place in the history of the encyclopedia and Enlightenment-era philosophies and the commoditization of knowledge-building.

Finally, this thesis recommends ways to mitigate the effects of Wikipedia’s gender gap and systemic bias, including improvements in research techniques and ways to use the policies that have hindered Wikipedia’s stated goals for both the diversity of volunteer editors and contributors and to the diversity of content in Wikipedia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and most importantly, I would like to thank the members of my thesis committee: Dr. Zachary Turpin, Dr. Tara MacDonald, and Dr. Sydney Freeman, Jr. Dr. Turpin, my main professor, with his much-appreciated sense of humor, has been an invaluable mentor and cheerleader throughout the time I have spent in the English MA program at the University of Idaho, and has supported me every step of the way, even during the Zoom sessions forced upon us by the COVID-19 outbreak. I thank Dr. Tara MacDonald for agreeing to serve on my committee and for her invaluable feedback and unconditional support and encouragement. Finally, I thank my friend, Dr. Sydney Freeman, Jr., for his invaluable and enthusiastic support and encouragement, and for his expertise, patience, and inspiration. I would also like to thank the faculty and staff of the Department of English at the University of Idaho for being a constant source of assistance, support, and encouragement, even during these difficult times, and for its culture of kindness, diversity, positivity, and creative and intellectual stimulation.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my children and the reason I do everything, George and AnnaRose Meyer, who never fail to inspire me and give me joy. I also want to thank my classmates in the English graduate program, both MA and MFA candidates, at the University of Idaho, for their kindness, generosity, support, encouragement, inspiration, and acceptance. It has a great honor and privilege to associate with and learn from such creative and intelligent artists and scholars.

I would like to thank Dr. Colleen D. Hartung and my fellow members of the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project, for their dedication in the mission of mitigating the gender gap and systemic bias on Wikipedia, for their support and encouragement, and for providing me with an outlet during the COVID-19 outbreak. My thanks and gratitude to the former members of Hog Heaven Toastmasters in Moscow, Idaho and the members of the Prayer Shawl Ministry group and Liturgy Committee at St. Mary's Parish in Moscow, Idaho, for joining me along this journey.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank the love of my life, my husband Jon Meyer, my best friend, my biggest supporter, and my harshest critic, who has always been there for me, no matter what, and is the reason for our family's wonderful life.

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INTRODUCTION:

“Changing the World, One Wikipedia Article at a Time”

In late May 2014, my husband and I took a much needed and rare weekend away for our wedding anniversary, away from the responsibilities of work, home, and family. On our drive back home, we stopped at Snoqualmie Falls, east of Spokane, Washington, walked around enjoying its beauty, and ate breakfast at a near-by hotel. I took out my phone as we waited for our meal to look at my newsfeed, and gasped. Jon asked, “What’s wrong?” and I said, “Maya Angelou died yesterday,” tears forming in my eyes. Although I had never met Angelou and did not know her personally, I felt her loss keenly due to my seven-year long project of improving articles about her and her writings on Wikipedia.

In September 2007, I made my first edit to the Wikipedia articles about African American writer and poet Maya Angelou and her 1969 autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. I was appalled by the state of both articles, and by the fact that despite Angelou’s great fame, extensive bibliography, her status as a civil rights leader and award-winning author, and her recitation of her poem at Bill Clinton’s first inauguration in 1993, there was little content about her and her works on Wikipedia. The state of these articles inspired me, with lots of assistance and mentoring from other members of the Wikipedia editing community to research, edit, and improve these articles. Eventually, by May 2014, shortly before her death at the age of 86, there were over 30 high-quality articles about Angelou, mostly due to my efforts. As often happens when a high-profile individual dies, or an important event happens, or a blockbuster film is released, the world turned to Wikipedia to learn about her, so her biography was the most-read article on Wikipedia and received over a million page views the week she passed away (“WP:Top 25 Report/May”). It was

almost as if Angelou, even though she probably did not know who I was, waited for me to finish the project before she passed. I was proud to be responsible for a reliable, well-researched, and well-written source about Angelou. It also demonstrates the adage I made up: If you want to change the world, edit Wikipedia.

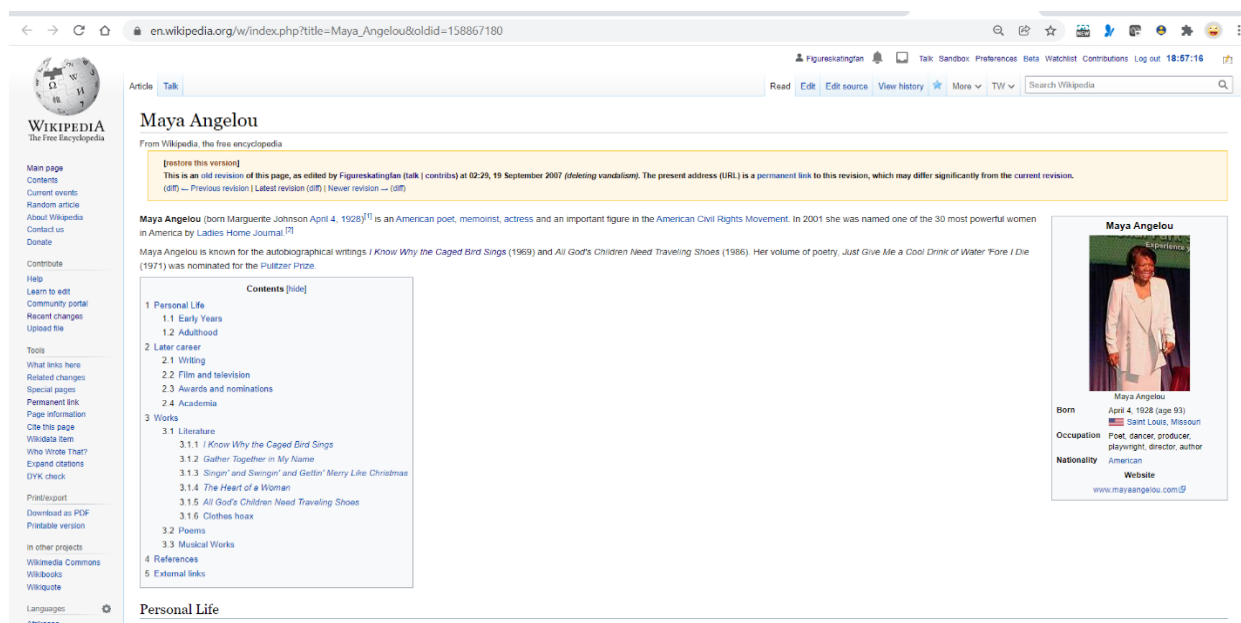


Image 1.1. Screenshot of “Maya Angelou,” the version of Angelou’s biography as of September 2007. The 2007 version is of significantly lower quality than the current version. For example, the current version is over three times larger than the 2007 one; it has more images that are of better quality and fulfills Wikipedia’s policies about free use images (Commons:Licensing); its content is more comprehensive and better portrays the entirety of Angelou’s life and career; and contains more reliable sources (eight compared to 183 and 16 items in the “Works cited” section). The 2007 version also has an inadequate introduction, or lead, the first section of a Wikipedia article that appears before the table of contents and the first heading. The lead is an introduction to and summary of the article, important because not only is it the first thing most people read, but it is also often the only part they read (WP:MOS). For example, the leads of articles about figure skating, another obscure topic I have focused on in Wikipedia, especially biographies about both male and female skaters, tend to be shorter, incomplete, and do not summarize them adequately. My newest niche in Wikipedia, obscure female saints, also has incomplete leads.

The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" as of October 2007. The article is significantly shorter than the current version. It features a table of contents with five items: 1. Explanation of the novel's title, 2. Plot summary, 3. Literary significance & criticism, 4. References, and 5. External links. The "Explanation of the novel's title" section includes a quote from Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem "Sympathy": "I know why the caged bird sings, ah me, / When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore, / When he beats his bars and would be free, / It is not a carol of joy or gloom, / But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core, / But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings - / I know why the caged bird sings. (Stanzas 17)". The "Plot summary" section is very brief, mentioning that the novel follows Marguerite's life and her struggles in the racist South, abandoned by her parents at an early age. It also mentions that the novel is a semi-autobiographical work. The article lacks images, references, and a detailed plot summary.

Image 1.2. Screenshot of “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,” the article about Angelou’s first, best known, and most critically acclaimed autobiography, as of October 2007. It is shocking that as of this late date in Wikipedia’s existence, an important work by a significant literary figure was in this state. There are no images; it is short, less than half the length of its current version; its references are woefully inadequate, as compared to the current version, which has almost 130 references and contains almost 20 items in its “Works cited” section; and it has no content about the literary significance and impact of an important work in African American literature and the autobiography/memoir. Also notice that the 2007 version has two plot summaries, and the second and longer one is poorly written and reads like a summary in a Cliffs Notes.

I found that my experience with articles about Angelou and other neglected biographies about women and female-centric topics was neither isolated or unusual, and that it was part of an insidious trend in Wikipedia, a trend that was just beginning to be discussed at the time I took on improving articles about Angelou. This trend came to be known, in the Wikipedia movement, in academic studies, and in the popular press, as the gender gap and systemic bias in Wikipedia. This trend is not new or relegated to Wikipedia but is part of the

centuries-long and large-scale tendency to “write women out of history,” not only in printed encyclopedias, but in historiographic and hagiographic contexts. Ironically, it is the very policies and guidelines that protect the integrity of the site, making it one of the most trusted sources for information on the internet, that have impeded the diversity and comprehensiveness of topics and content, especially those about women and other neglected and obscure topics. It is the aim of this thesis to discuss the range of the problem, both currently as it relates to a 21st century project like Wikipedia and in encyclopedias, historiographic, and hagiographic sources, and the steps the Wikipedia editing community and Wikimedia, the organization that oversees Wikipedia and other projects, can do to mitigate this unfortunate trend.

Working on Angelou’s biography and her works and influence on the modern literary scene was not the defining moment that would eventually make me the premiere expert on Wikipedia about her life and writings and inspire me to study literature at the graduate level. That happened a little earlier, in the summer of 2008 (my first edit to the site was in early 2007), when I found a humorous piece of vandalism on Wikipedia. I do not remember how I came across it, but it appeared in the Wikipedia article about piracy. Vandalism on Wikipedia, a problem that endangers the integrity of the site, but is commonplace due to its crowd-sourced nature, has been defined by the Wikipedia editing community as “editing the project in an intentionally disruptive or malicious manner” and “includes any addition, removal, or modification that is humorous, nonsensical, a hoax, or degrading in any way” (“Vandalism”).

One of the most common misconceptions about Wikipedia is because it is crowd-sourced and anyone can edit it, although not everyone does, is that it is full of errors and

misinformation (Ford and Wajcmanit 511). On the contrary, studies have shown that Wikipedia is, at times, more accurate than other encyclopedias, including major series like the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Giles 900). (I will discuss the reliability of Wikipedia, especially in comparison with other sources, later in this thesis.) There are structures, policies, and guidelines, placed by the Wikipedia editing community, that are highly effective in preventing, combatting, and reverting vandalism. Loren Cobb, a scholar/Wikipedia editor, found that, on the average, 50% of vandalism on Wikipedia is detected and reverted, or returned to its more accurate and unmolested version, within four minutes after it is added (Cobb). In 2004, Fernanda B. Viégas and her colleagues, in their study of vandalism and how the editing community deals with it, found that half of what they called “mass deletions,” or edits that removed 90% of the article’s content, was reverted within 2.8 minutes, and half of “malicious edits,” of mass deletions that were deemed ill-intentioned and included obscenities, were reverted within 1.7 minutes (579). There are software applications, or “bots,” that automatically search for, correct, and revert vandalism, but this work is also done by hand, by editors, as it was done in this case on the “Piracy” article. A vandal, most likely a bored teenager, added the lyrics to a song about pirates, and an editor reverted it, rightly so, shortly afterwards. I recognized the lyrics, which was from an episode of the children’s Icelandic television show *LazyTown*, pointed it out to the editor, and mused, “How sad is it that I know that useless piece of information?”

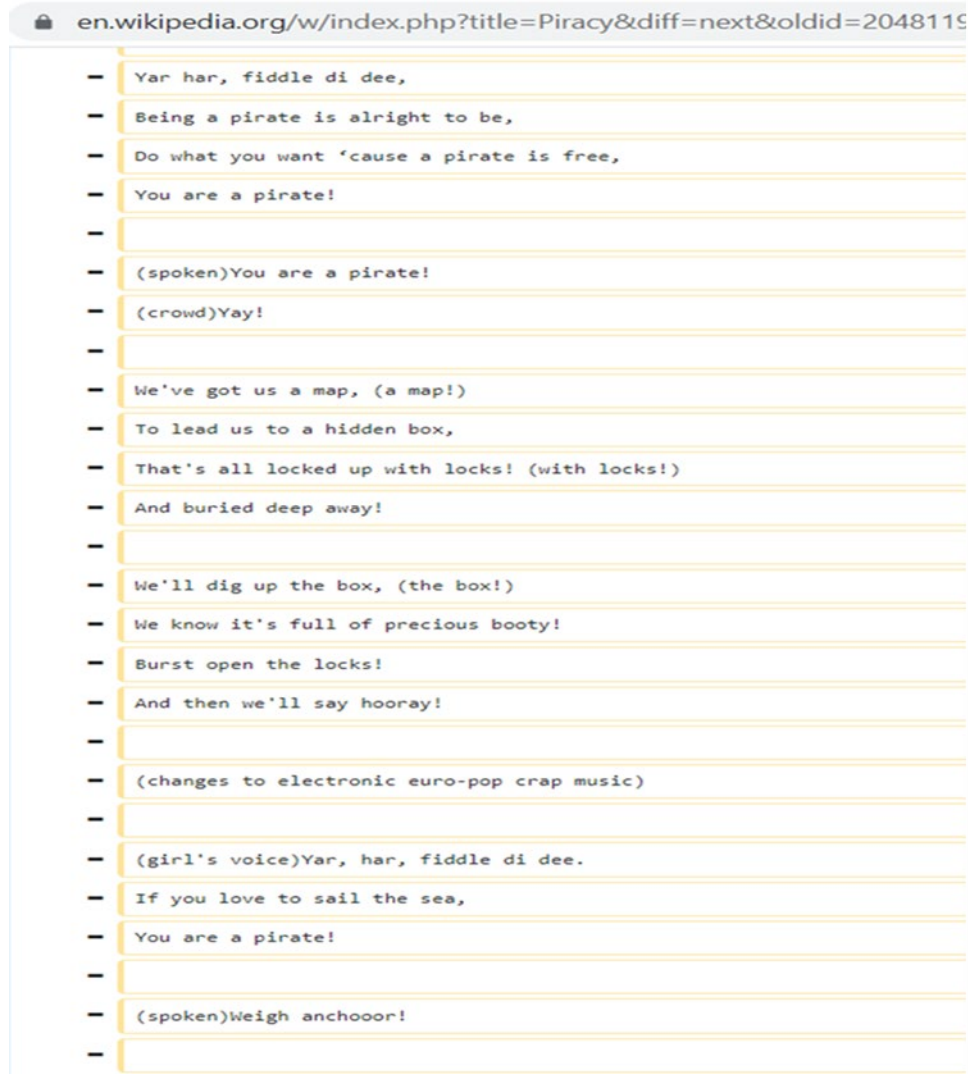


Image 1.3. Screenshot of the song lyrics added to the “Piracy” article. I have marked the strongest indication that this addition, which violates Wikipedia’s policies about tone and offensive material, is vandalism. It also illustrates, as I stated to the editor who reverted it, that “Some vandalism is so well done, it’s shame to have to revert it.”

A more recent example of vandalism that I was involved with was in September 2021, after Steve Burns, original host of the children’s television program *Blue’s Clues*, a topic I know a great deal about because of the huge impact it has made in the daily life of my family and because I worked on its Wikipedia article (as well as the biography about Burns),

broadcast a short video clip celebrating the show's 25th anniversary. The week the video went viral, Burns' biography was the sixth most read article on Wikipedia, at over 1.3 million page views, and the "Blues Clues" article was the seventeenth, at over half a million page views ("WP:Top Views/September"). Both articles were vandalized heavily that week, also most likely by bored teenagers, like those who used *Lazy Town* to vandalize the "Piracy" article. Vandalism has been a problem with any article associated with *Blue's Clues*, especially since I began to work on them beginning in 2007 (I overhauled and did a major re-write of "Blue's Clues" in the summer of 2021), often to humorous effects. For example, rumors and speculations have not only dogged Burns, so to speak, but also his Wikipedia biography and the main article, with vandals consistently and persistently adding ridiculous and unsourced claims about why Burns left the show in 2002, such as he was fired due to amongst other things, drug abuse and pedophilia, and most recently, that he was a Taliban fighter. My experiences with Burns' biography, the articles about *Blue's Clues* and Maya Angelou, and even the "Piracy" article, demonstrate some of the strange experiences Wikipedia editors can sometimes have, which I believe, as I will demonstrate later in this thesis, both the odd literature nature of Wikipedia and of the sources I and other Wikipedia editors often must use to support the claims made in articles about obscure and neglected topics (such as the articles about Angelou) we write, edit, and improve.



Image 1.4. Steve Burns, 2014 (CC BY 3.0).

I find it interesting that Matthew A. Vetter considered his entry into the Wikipedia community his contributions to the article about “aporia” (or “puzzle”), which he considered a philosophical analogy for his involvement in what I have come to call “Wikipedia studies,” while mine was noticing the lyrics to a song in a children’s television program used to vandalize the article about piracy. Like Vetter’s first real contributions foreshadowed his eventual academic interests in Wikipedia, my first real foray into Wikipedia not only foreshadowed my eventual niche of writing, researching, and improving articles about children’s media and television programming, as well as my interests in the more social and organizational aspects of Wikipedia studies, especially to mitigate its gender gap and systemic bias. It also foreshadowed my eventual involvement with obscure topics and the obscure sources to support them.

It is my hope that this thesis assists others in the mission of helping to mitigate the gender bias and systemic bias on Wikipedia. First, in chapter one, I describe the scope of this seemingly overwhelming problem. I describe the gender gap in Wikipedia, the unfortunate truth that only 22% of Wikipedia editors worldwide are women, and the often-severe harassment that female and non-white editors experience on Wikipedia. Finally, I describe a significant content gap on Wikipedia (as of 2014, only 14% of biographies on Wikipedia are about women) and the gendered language that appears in many biographies about women and female-centric articles. Finally, I discuss the efforts to mitigate the effects of the gender gap and systemic bias on Wikipedia by organized groups of Wikipedia activists. Chapter two begins with a recounting of the early history of Wikipedia. I then go into the history of the encyclopedia, and Wikipedia’s place, with its promises and stated goals of being a depository of all human knowledge, in both the Enlightenment and modern eras. In chapter three, I

discuss what has been done by individual editors and organized groups to solve this seemingly unsolvable problem, some of the challenges editors face in researching and creating content about obscure and underrepresented topics, and how editors and activists can use the policies that have both caused and exacerbated the problem.

CHAPTER ONE:

A Description of the Problem, or “Quality over Quantity”



Image 1.5 (CC BY-SA 3.0)

As of this writing in early 2022, I have made a little over 35,000 edits to Wikipedia, which may not seem like much when you compare it to others who have been around the editing community for similar periods of time. I like to think, however, that my relatively low edit count is due to how as an editor, I have always tended to value “quality over quantity” (“WP:Edit Count”). At any rate, it makes me an unusual Wikipedia user. Most of the millions who use Wikipedia are readers and rarely, if ever, contribute to the site, but I am classified as “an active editor,” or someone who has a registered account and username (mine is “Figureskatingfan”), and who has made contributions to the English language version of Wikipedia in the previous 30 days (“WP:Edit Count”). Also as of February 2022, I am the 2,820th most active Wikipedia contributor (“WP:List”), so I am proud to say that I am a part of a small, elite group of individuals. Another way in which I am an unusual Wikipedia user is that I am self-identified as female.

Most Wikipedia editors are male; a 2021 report by Wikimedia, the organization that oversees Wikipedia and other projects, states that globally, women make up 15% of

contributors (Davis). They also found that women contributors make up 22% of the editing community in North America (Davis). Wiki Education, a group that encourages the editing of Wikipedia articles in college classrooms, takes credit for that substantial increase because their programs occur in the U.S. and Canada. Wiki Education conducted a survey, also in 2021, of its program participants and found that 67% of its participants identify as women, 30% identify as men, and 3% identify as non-binary or other, so the progress towards making Wikipedia more egalitarian has made real progress in the last several years. The survey also demonstrated that Wiki Education’s participants are more diverse than the general editing population, probably because North American participants in secondary education tend to be more diverse and more women are entering colleges and universities there. Wiki Education offers the following statistics from the survey to back up their claim (Davis):

89% of U.S. Wikipedia editors identify as white, while only 55% of their participants do.
8.8% of U.S. Wikipedia editors identify as Asian or Asian American, compared to 18% of their participants do.
5.2% of U.S. Wikipedia editors identify as Hispanic or Latino/a/x, while 12% of their participants do.
0.5% of U.S. Wikipedia editors identify as Black or African American, while 8% of their participants do.
0.1% of U.S. Wikipedia editors identify as Native American, while 1% of their participants do.
6% of their participants identify as biracial, multiracial, or another self-reported category.

Table 1.1: Wiki Education statistics (2021)

While Wiki Education has made great progress in helping to solve the gender gap problem on Wikipedia and that their programs expose college and university students to Wikipedia by teaching them how Wikipedia works and making them more informed consumers, their survey does not address retention. In other words, how many of their

participants continue to edit Wikipedia after their courses are over? As of this writing, no formal studies exist that answers this question.

As recently as 2015, women did not consider Wikipedia a safe place, like many places on the internet, and that it requires a “taxing level of emotional labor” (Menking and Erickson 2009) for women editors to navigate, especially on article talk pages, the places editors gather to discuss and debate changes to articles and the areas where the social media aspect of the site occurs. Talk pages are also good places for those involved with Wikipedia studies to analyze patterns of interactivity among editors and to track the harassment and the more insidious aspects of the site. Amanda Menking and Ingrid Erickson conducted and analyzed interviews with twenty Wikipedia contributors who self-identified as women. Despite their stories of conflict, trolling, harassment, and stress, they reported experiencing a great amount of personal satisfaction from contributing to Wikipedia but tended to manage their personal safety by avoiding topics or areas that could open them up for harassment. One woman reported that she did not experience the trolling or harassment other female editors went through because she purposively focused on “safe” topics and because like many women, she was already dealing with enough emotional labor “in real life.” I share this editor’s experience: while it is true that I have experienced less severe harassment, mostly in the form of microaggressions, I have also chosen topics (Maya Angelou, children’s music and television programming, figure skating, and obscure female saints) that are non-controversial, not on purpose but because of my own natural tendency to avoid additional stress and conflict. I have, however, witnessed more severe and overt forms of harassment. An editor I worked with on different articles for many years and became a good friend with was the victim of some of the most severe, appalling, and unjust harassment I have

witnessed, both on and off the internet, to the point where it adversely affected her already-compromised health and might have been one of the factors that led to her tragic and untimely death early in 2021.

The female contributors in Menking and Erickson's study also did not feel that the Wikipedia community was doing enough to ensure that it was a safe place for them to freely contribute and participate. They managed their participation and the stress they experienced from active participation in the editing community by controlling when to be active, something I have also done by taking periodic breaks from contributing, usually when I am busy with responsibilities in other parts of my life, when I decide that they are more important than contributing to Wikipedia. A 2019 *New York Times* op-ed described the often severe and aggressive harassment that many female editors experience, although the examples it used made it seem like it was a problem more common outside of North America and the English-language version of Wikipedia. Julia Jacobs, the writer of *The New York Times* piece, interviewed a female editor, who said about her experience with being attacked on talk pages, "Sometimes it can be so aggressive that you give up and run away from the article."

The problem is not just limited to female editors; as Jacobs reports, editors who self-identify as LGBTQ have also experienced severe and persistent harassment, especially if they contribute to biographies about members of LGBTQ communities or articles about gender, sex, or LGBTQ-related topics. They are also places in which editors from underrepresented groups can gather to strategize and support one another. Jacobs relayed the story of trans male Wikipedia editor Pax Ahimsa Gethen, who experienced personal attacks on talk pages and other pages by an anonymous user who called them "unloved," that they

belonged in an internment camp, and that they should commit suicide. The user also publicly posted Gethen's deadname, the name they used before their transition, which is the highest form of insult for trans people. After several months of harassment, Gethen told Jacobs, "I'm not getting paid for this. Why should I volunteer my time to be abused?" (Jacobs). Fortunately, Gethen's anonymous harasser was eventually banned completely from Wikipedia, although it took several months for it to finally happen.

In 2014, the notorious controversy "Gamergate," in which women involved in the video game industry became "the victims of a series of online and offline misogynistic attacks" (Evans et al.) found its way onto Wikipedia. Eventually, the perpetrators were also banned from Wikipedia, another process that took longer than it should have and was perhaps more contentious than it should have been. Online harassment on Wikipedia has been well-documented. The founders of Art+Feminism, one of thousands of WikiProjects, or organized groups dedicated to working on a specific area in Wikipedia, recount the harassment they have experienced, both on Wikipedia and on other forums in a chapter they wrote in *Wikipedia @ 20: Stories of an Incomplete Revolution* (2020), published to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Wikipedia (Evans et al.). Their response was to create their own safe spaces and policies in the in-person and virtual events they organized, such as national and international conferences and edit-a-thons, or sessions that recruit and assist new Wikipedia editors (Evans et al.). Ironically, the harassment they and others describe conflicts with Wikipedia's stated goals of consensus-building. For example, according to the policies regarding behavior on talk (or discussion) pages, which provide "space for editors to discuss changes to its associated article or WikiProject" (WP:Talk Page Guidelines), it is expected that editors follow etiquette rules when interacting with other editors on talk pages, but as we

have already seen, in our discussion about the harassment of female and underrepresented editors, does not always occur.

The Wikimedia Foundation has made some concerted efforts to make Wikipedia a safer place for female and LGBTQ editors by creating anti-harassment tools that they hope will be more effective than the current way the Wikipedia community deals with harassment, which is encouraging victims to report instances of harassment on an on-site notice board. Administrators, volunteers who manage and enforce the technical and community aspects of Wikipedia, then investigate allegations and make decisions about banning perpetrators from editing. This is by no means an always effective way to deal with the problem, so Wikimedia is currently in the process of developing other tools and more effective methods to prevent and punish trolling and harassment. Currently, these tools include topic bans that prevent those found guilty of harassment and other inappropriate behaviors from editing articles about controversial and contentious topics, and partial blocks, which prevents perpetrators from editing the articles where they have demonstrated these behaviors. Violations of a topic ban and partial block can result in a sitewide ban, which bars them from editing anywhere on the site. The partial block tool was developed to bar editors from specific topics without preventing them from editing about less problematic topics (Jacobs), although as an editor who has experienced some of that harassment and witnessed more severe harassment than others have experienced, I am not sure if these tools will be effective in curbing harassment, which bars females and members of LGBTQ communities from freely editing and contributing to Wikipedia.

Another way the gender gap and systemic bias expresses itself on Wikipedia is in its content. A survey conducted in 2014 found that only 14% of the biographies on Wikipedia

were about women (Maher). Much has been made in both academic circles and in the popular press about physicist Donna Strickland, who won the Nobel Prize in physics in 2018 but did not have a Wikipedia article at the time. She did have one in 2014, but it was marked for deletion six minutes after it was created and then removed shortly afterwards, despite unmistakable evidence of her professional endeavors, which included inventing a technology used by all high-powered lasers in the world in use at the time. Francesca Tripodi of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found in a study she conducted in 2021 that the perceptions of Strickland's notability were not unusual and that the history of her biography fits "a broader pattern regarding how women's biographies that merit a Wikipedia page are disproportionately perceived as non-notable subjects" (2). I would add that this pattern does not only exist in Wikipedia, but as we will see later in this thesis, that it has existed throughout history.



Image 1.6: Donna Strickland, 2018 (CC BY 2.0)

However, Claudia Wagner and her colleagues' findings, in their 2015 computational study assessing gender bias on Wikipedia, are in stark contrast to the studies conducted by Wikipedia and other scholars studying the problem. They found that notable women¹ have a "high likelihood of being represented on Wikipedia" (8), that they are slightly

overrepresented in comparison to articles about men, and that articles about women tend to be longer than articles about men, which they speculate could be due to the efforts of Wikipedia editors to improve the coverage of minorities on Wikipedia (5). They also found, when they did a deeper analysis of the content of biographies about women, that evidence of gender bias is evidenced in “subtle lexical and structural gender biases” (8) in Wikipedia. They found, however, that women are portrayed startlingly different from the way men are portrayed (1). For example, their lexical analysis comparing articles about men and articles about women revealed that articles about women tend to emphasize the fact that they are about women, demonstrating that Wikipedia supports the societal norms of the binary heteronormativity of gender (5-6).

Tripoldi’s study demonstrates how women’s contributions are contested, even in the 21st century, and how someone’s gender “affects their perceived significance” (2). For example, in 2013, in a similar situation dubbed “categorygate” (Wadewitz) by the popular press, a probably well-meaning editor created a new subcategory, which editors use to help readers search for topics more effectively, entitled “American women novelists.” They then began to systematically move American women novelists out of the older category, “American novelists,” to the new one. As Amanda Filipacchi pointed out when she noticed and broke the story in *The New York Times*, American male novelists did not warrant their own subcategory. This is not an insignificant event because it, along with the Donna Strickland story, demonstrate the gender gap on Wikipedia. As Filipacchi also stated, “It’s probably small, easily fixable things like this that make it harder and slower for women to gain equality in the literary world” (Filipacchi). It also reinforces the view that gender is

binary and protects the heteronormative status quo, another expression of the systemic bias on Wikipedia.

Tripodi describes previous discussions about the gender inequality of content on Wikipedia, which provides an accessible way to study the persistence of gender inequality in the 21st century and specifically, the underrepresentation of women in all fields and the underdevelopment of articles about women's interests. Tripodi states, mirroring the work done by Menking and Erickson discussed earlier, that other researchers have written about the "hardships women face when editing Wikipedia... [and] the need to consider safety risks involved before editing certain topics or entering contentious spaces" (2). Tripodi also studies how the interpretation and application of Wikipedia's notability guidelines, which I will describe in chapter three along with other policies and guidelines, plays an important role in the perpetuation of gender equality on Wikipedia. Her data demonstrates that biographies that meet Wikipedia's criteria for inclusion are more likely to be categorized as non-notable than men's biographies. In other words, in order for women's biographies to exist, the women they portray must be more notable than men. This was certainly the case for Strickland's biography. It also demonstrates that the very policies and guidelines that are meant to protect the integrity of the site also help perpetuate the gender gap and systemic bias on Wikipedia.

Tripodi agrees with me that the application and interpretation of Wikipedia's notability guidelines influences the perpetuation of gender inequality there, something I will discuss in chapter three. She found in her study that biographies about women, even though they clearly satisfy Wikipedia's criteria for inclusion, are nevertheless more likely to be considered non-notable than the men who warrant a biography there. Other studies have

demonstrated that women's biographies are underdeveloped and underrepresented, that many notable women do not even appear anywhere on the site, and that regardless of the field of study or scientific achievement, "being male increases the chance of being recognized and featured on Wikipedia" (Tripodi 3). Both Tripodi and Wagner et al. (6) found that women's biographies on Wikipedia are more likely to indicate gender or connection to a male (for example, "first female astronaut" or "wife of"). The biography about Hillary Clinton, which is a featured article, or an article that has been deemed one of the best on the site and highly vetted for excellence and has received protection from the vandalism that plagues the articles of controversial subjects and topics, for example, is a good illustration of this overly gendered language on Wikipedia. As of this writing (early 2022), the first sentence of the lead, or what serves as the article's introduction, states that Clinton served as first lady of the United States, "as the wife of President Bill Clinton" and goes on to state that she was the first woman to procure a presidential nomination by a major U.S. political party and the first woman to win the popular vote in a presidential election, making sure, however, to point out that she lost the Electoral College ("Hillary Clinton"). A cursory glance at the revision history of Clinton's biography demonstrates, even as of this writing, that the battle to limit its gendered language continues. As Tripodi states, "Marking women's pages with gendered language reifies a heteronormative hierarchy, creating a precedent that a notable person is presumed to be male unless otherwise stated" (3).

Tripodi seems to agree with the late Adrienne Wadewitz, who writes in a blog post shortly before her untimely and tragic death in 2014 and who was one of my mentors during my early days as an editor, that it is not only up to individual women to solve the gender gap and systemic bias problem on Wikipedia, but that the burden lies with the groups, consisting

of both men and women, that have been organized to tackle it (2). As Wadewitz states, “Wikipedia’s systemic sexism lessens its legitimacy as a producer and organizer of knowledge, therefore it is the responsibility of every Wikipedian to combat that sexism” (“Wikipedia’s Gender Gap”). In other words, the task is so monumental that it requires more than individual editors like me tackling it on their own, although that is a significant start and important part of the strategy parts of the editing community has taken. As prolific Wikipedia editor, retired engineer Roger Bamkin, and co-founder of the Wikipedia project Women in Red, a group I discuss below, has stated, the problem is too big to wait until more female editors are recruited (Zitser). Additionally, an increase in diversity among editors does not necessarily mean that the coverage of topics will also be diversified. I have already demonstrated that Wiki Education has made great inroads, at least in North America, even if it was not their stated mission to do so and that their influence was an unintentional positive consequence. The real improvements in mitigating the gender gap and systemic bias on Wikipedia have been made, however, when there has been concerted effort by several factions of the editing community, groups organized for the purpose of solving the problem. Colleen Hartung of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) calls members of these groups “activists” (xxv). I believe that these groups can serve as a model for what can happen when groups are organized to solve specific problems on Wikipedia.

In the summer of 2014, I was invited to attend a series of training workshops about how to run edit-a-thons and other organizing events in Washington, D.C. At the end of the training we had to share ideas for projects we wanted to create; to be honest, I came up with a few ideas, but nothing that has made any real difference in the Wikipedia movement. Also in attendance was Rosie Stephenson-Goodknight, a retired health administrator and even at that

time, a prolific Wikipedia editor, who shared her idea of starting a WikiProject about improving articles about women writers and their works. She founded this group, named WikiProject Women Writers, in August 2014; as of January 2022, the group is responsible for the creation and improvement of over 60,000 articles (WP:WikiProject Women Writers). The Women Writers Wikiproject was the precursor to a much more successful Wikiproject, Women in Red, which was co-founded by Stephenson-Goodnight and Bamkin, a year later in 2015. Consequently, I am proud to say, to quote from the great musical *Hamilton*, that I was “in the room when it happened;” namely, the creation of one group that has successfully made inroads to solving the gender gap and systemic bias on Wikipedia that led to another even more successful group.

One of the objectives of Women in Red, one of the largest and most active projects on Wikipedia, is to “turn ‘redlinks’ into blue ones” (“WP:Women in Red”), or in other words, to turn links to potential articles or articles that do not exist (marked by the color red) into blue links, or articles that do exist, helping to solve what Francesca Tripoldi calls “gendered networking” (3) on Wikipedia. Gendered networking, according to Tripoldi, is the tendency for female-centric articles to have fewer hyperlinks connecting them to other articles as compared to male-centric articles, which tend to be well linked and connected to other articles throughout Wikipedia. Wagner et al, in their study discussed earlier in this thesis, had similar findings, discovering that fewer biographies about women link to biographies about men and that fewer biographies about men link to biographies about women (5). Tripodi states that because articles and biographies with adequate hyperlinks attract more readers and editors and send them to other articles and biographies to view and contribute to, biographies about women and female-centric articles with fewer links are in

more danger of not surviving threats of being deleted and are less likely to be read, edited, and improved over time. Women in Red, then, not only aids in the creation of new articles about women and female-centric topics on Wikipedia; it also links existing articles to each other. As of January 2022, Women in Red is responsible for the creation of almost 178,000 new biographies about women on Wikipedia (“WP: Metrics”).

The 1000 Women in Religion WikiProject, the group I have the most personal involvement in, is another organized group working to address the gender gap and systemic bias on Wikipedia. It was founded in 2018 by Colleen D. Hartung, as part of her auspices as a member of the Women’s Caucus of the AAR, with an even more specific mission: to address the problem of the lack of articles and representation of women religious (spiritual and religious leaders, theologians, teachers, and saints) on Wikipedia. In her 2020 essay, “Leveraging Notability: Defining, Critiquing and Strategically Engaging a Wikipedia Guideline,” Hartung describes the strategy the AAR and the 1000 Women in Religion WikiProject has used to mitigate the gender gap, by tackling the problem on two fronts: increasing content in general scholarship about women religious and creating and improving Wikipedia articles about them. In 2020, Hartung edited the first in a series of monographs, *Claiming Notability for Women Activists in Religion*, published for the purpose of creating content in the general scholarship specifically so that editors could use them as sources to increase the content about women religious on Wikipedia. As of this writing in February 2022, however, the project has hit a major snag and lost its institutional and publishing home; the group is working hard to find other resources and avenues to achieve its goals. However, despite the project’s short history and the fact that much of its work has been done during the era of COVID-19, the results thus far are impressive. Since 2018, members of the 1000

Women in Religion WikiProject have led dozens of edit-a-thons, participated in about a dozen conference panels, has conducted monthly strategy sessions and edit-a-thons, and has worked with member librarians to create lists of underrepresented female religious, not only on Wikipedia, but in academia in general (Hartung xxv). From that list, as of January 2022, the project has created, improved, and expanded over 200 biographies of women religious. My involvement has included creating and expanding dozens of articles about obscure female saints and acting as an expert in editing for Wikipedia gained over the years and assisting other project members and newcomers, many of whom have lacked the technical skills necessary to improve and create Wikipedia articles.

As I have already stated, most of these articles were short, about 500 words long, mostly due to the lack of available sources, a challenge with them and other articles about obscure topics, something I describe in chapter three of this thesis. Most of the saints I researched and wrote about were inspirational to me on a personal, religious, and spiritual basis. They were of great personal comfort to me during COVID-19 and I was gratified to make sure they got the attention they deserved. It is my hope that others can do the same for more female saints, as well as other women in danger of being excluded from Wikipedia, and thus in danger of being written out of history.

CHAPTER TWO:

“The Sum of All Human Knowledge”

Wikipedia was founded by Jimmy “Jimbo” Wales and Larry Sanger on January 15, 2001 (Cellan-Jones). Wales, who studied finance in college and graduate school, was an options trader in the mid-1990s and led and contributed to philosophical discussion email lists, or listservs, the first popular discussion forums on the internet that surfaced in the late 1980s, when email first spread through the humanities academic world. Wales was an active contributor to and moderator of a listserv about objectivism, the philosophical system developed by Ayn Rand. Despite the freewheeling trolling, or purposeful bad behavior that was endemic on online forums both today and at the time, Wales insisted on, in the forums he led, that their participants treat others with respect, courtesy, and civility. As Marshall Poe of *The Atlantic* stated,² Wales advocated for “open” online communities, with few restrictions on membership or posting, other than the expectations that participants would stay on topic and not post “gratuitous ad hominem attacks” (Poe), which fit Wales’ beliefs about objectivism.



Image 2.1: Jimmy Wales, 2019
(CC BY-SA 4.0)



Image 2.2: Larry Sanger, 2006
(CC BY-SA 2.5)

In 1996, Wales and two of his partners founded Bomis, an early search engine modelled after Yahoo. According to Poe, Wales believed in the power of distributed, or peer-to-peer, content production and that with the right kind of technology, large groups of people could unite to create something they would not be able to produce on their own (Poe). Amy Bruckman of Georgia Tech agrees, stating that the internet creates communities that are no longer limited by geography, which in turn can create shared knowledge and content in powerful ways (3). In early 2000, Wales and Larry Sanger, a graduate student in philosophy who worked for Wales, began Nupedia, an online encyclopedia that depended on the contributions of its users, all unpaid volunteers, to build its content. Not only would the knowledge and content be open to all users, but it would also be based upon Eric S. Raymond's "bazaar model" of software development, as he described in his seminal essay (and later book) "The Cathedral and the Bazaar," which described the "cathedral model," or software that was developed and guarded by a core group of developers, and the "bazaar model," or software like Linux released for free on the internet that anyone could change and develop. At first, Nupedia, despite its online format, was an academic journal, with a traditional publishing model written by experts and published after extensive peer review (Poe; Bruckman 34). Publication of articles was agonizingly slow; as Poe stated, instead of creating the bazaar they intended, Wales and Sanger had created a cathedral.

The concept of online communities that exist in non-physical, virtual spaces, as well as Raymond's cathedral and bazaar, which also exist in non-physical spaces, is rooted in Michel Foucault's epistemology of knowledge and knowledge-building. In his seminal 1967 speech, "Of Other Spaces," he uses the mirror as an example of both a utopia, or "a placeless place" or "fundamentally unreal spaces," and a heterotopia, or a place that is "outside of all

places” (Foucault). He goes on to state, “The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there” (Foucault). Wikipedia could very well fall within Foucault’s definition of a heterotopia, a space that is accessed through a physical object (the computer or other device) but also exists within a non-physical, virtual space. Foucault also states that heterotopias (and heterochronies, or heterotopias “linked to slices in time”) are “structured and distributed in a relatively complex fashion” (Foucault), something that is certainly true of Wikipedia.

Wales’ and Sanger’s first attempts to create a free-source online encyclopedia paralleled traditional encyclopedia-making done throughout the history of the encyclopedia. Wales and Sanger had to decide what kind of encyclopedia they were creating, Pliny the Elder’s kind, produced during the 1st century C.E., written solely by Pliny and read by the elite, or the 28-volume *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (*Encyclopedia, or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts*), also known as *Encyclopédie* (*Encyclopedia*), edited by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert, written by 150 contributors, and published beginning in 1751 in France, during the height of the Enlightenment. In 1962, encyclopedist and popular game show contestant Charles Van Doren, speaking specifically of *Encyclopédie française*, published between 1935 and 1966, which he considered a radical publication, stated that any encyclopedist must ask themselves the kind of encyclopedia they sought to build (23). In other words, Wales and Sanger had to decide if their encyclopedia would be written and consumed by a few, as

Pliny's was, or, to use the modern term, crowd-sourced and read and used by many, as Diderot's was.

Early single-author encyclopedias, of Pliny's variety, were meant primarily for the elite, a situation aggravated by their long and expensive production, done mostly by priests or nobles (Todorović 89-90), who traditionally neglected the contributions of women and non-Europeans to most fields of study. As Todorović stated, "The idea of compiling so much knowledge in one book, sometimes with multiple volumes, continued through medieval times in Europe and Asia, the Renaissance, and all the way to the present day" (89). For example, Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636), a cleric and scholar who served as Archbishop of Seville for thirty years, wrote the first encyclopedia of the Middle Ages to educate the Spanish elite (Collison 33). Vincent of Beauvais, another cleric (a Dominican friar from France), completed the *Speculum Maius* (the *Speculum*) in 1244, a four-volume encyclopedia that Collison calls "undoubtedly the outstanding achievement of the Middle Ages" (60). After the invention of the printing press, however, more people could afford to purchase books and consequently literacy rates began to rise, which democratized the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge, including the practice of producing and selling encyclopedias that emerged during the Enlightenment, something philosopher Miloš Todorović considers revolutionary (90).

Wales' and Sanger's production of an online encyclopedia open to all readers is just as revolutionary, although they had to overcome barriers that prevented the revolutionary democratization of the kind of dissemination of knowledge they sought. Early single-author encyclopedias, due to necessity, focused on relatively few topics, but after the printing press and popularization of radical, progressive, and liberal political ideologies starting during the

Enlightenment, encyclopedias began to try to encompass and compile all Western knowledge and scholarship up to that point, although because space and resources were limited, and due to societal norms, women's lives and contributions continued to be neglected. By contrast, the mission statement of Wikipedia today, as formulated by Jimmy Wales (who calls it Wikipedia's "prime directive") is: "Imagine a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge" (Garton Ash). According to Matthew A. Vetter, who considers Wikipedia as "emerging directly from an Enlightenment positioning of the genre" (Vetter), Wales promised similar Enlightenment ideals in his encyclopedia. It is also another way Wikipedia, like libraries and museums, falls in Foucault's heterotopia. Foucault contrasts the libraries and museums of the 19th century, which were "the expression of an individual choice" like Pliny's encyclopedia, with their modern expressions, which he describes as "the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place" (Foucault).

As Vetter delves more into what I call "Wikipedia studies," he makes note of "the complicated reality of Wikipedia's biases toward Western, rational, and print-centric knowledge-making practices" (Vetter), its gender gap and systemic bias, and how it both challenges and protects the genre of the encyclopedia. As we have already seen, while "Wikipedia challenges traditional ideals of transparency, access, authorship, expertise, and other constructs, it also conserves features of historic encyclopedias that characterize its emergence from Western Enlightenment logic—especially practices and policies related to

verifiability and reliability that are rooted in print-centric notions of knowledge curation” (Vetter). Both Wales and Diderot use “an ambitious, Enlightenment-era understanding of knowledge as a tangible commodity” (Vetter), which can be discovered, recorded, and shared with the world, but while Diderot’s idealism is understandable due to his times, the epistemological views of Wales and the Wikipedia community conflict with postmodern views of knowledge, knowledge building, and epistemology that emerged in the 20th century. Vetter believes that this conflict explains the gender gap and systemic bias in Wikipedia, despite its lofty and idealistic goals and claims. In many ways, Wikipedia is a contradiction, rooted in the ideals of the Enlightenment despite being a post-modern, 21st century creation. As Gary Gutting states in his discussion of the epistemology of Foucault, different intellectual periods produced knowledge in different ways (139). The development of the encyclopedia, which occurred consistently through Western intellectual history, reflects these changes. In order for Wikipedia to continue its success into the post-modern era, then, it must adapt to post-modern ways of knowledge-building.

Vetter also believed that Wikipedia’s “adherence to print culture,” central to encyclopedia-making since the invention of the printing press, both demonstrates and supports “the rational and modern insistence on the primacy of the written word” (Vetter) as the most important avenue to convey knowledge. By not encouraging the use of other knowledge-making practices, Wikipedia has excluded contributors who practice or only have access to other types of knowledge-making methods such as oral histories. Therein lies the paradox of Wikipedia: an open access platform does not necessarily foster equal participation, easy access, or acceptance by the wider culture, although academia has been more open to Wikipedia in recent years. As Vetter states, “Wikipedia’s adherence to the

practice and tradition of print places it firmly in the encyclopedic tradition, yet it is also this placement that prevents it from accomplishing its encyclopedic goal of becoming a global human knowledge source” (Vetter). In other words, it is the very policies and procedures that have made Wikipedia successful and in this age of disinformation and conspiracy theories, the most trustworthy source on the internet. Vetter agrees that three Wikipedia policies, which are also rooted in the encyclopedic history and tradition are to blame: reliability, notability, and “no original research,” which I will discuss more fully in chapter three.

The first encyclopedia with the lofty, revolutionary aims mentioned above was produced between 1751 and 1772, by Diderot, d'Alembert, and “a group of like-minded individuals” (Todorović 91). Todorović calls the *Encyclopédie* “one of the most ambitious and famous scientific projects of the century” (91) and “the embodiment of the Enlightenment” (92). Instead of a collection of knowledge in one field, it was intended to be a collection of all Western thinking up to that time including science, philosophy, religion, crafts, and the arts, written so that its readers could have access to information about a wide range of topics, which Todorović also calls its most important innovation. The *Encyclopédie* was also the first encyclopedia structured like a dictionary and was the first to contain illustrations, which influenced subsequent encyclopedias (Todorović 91), including Wikipedia. However, although the *Encyclopédie* is, as Todorović calls it, “a synthesis of the [liberal] philosophical, scientific, and critical spirit that characterized the period” (92), it was still, due to its length and the expense of producing it, and despite its values of accessibility for all, available mainly to a rich and elite audience of readers because they were able to afford to purchase and use it. For example, Madame de Pompadour, the mistress of King Louis XV, was a major supporter of its publication; a copy of the *Encyclopédie* can even be

seen in one of her portraits, painted in 1755. According to Todorović, Diderot's ideas of sharing knowledge and the publication of comprehensive encyclopedias spread to other countries; for example, the *Encyclopédie* influenced the publication of later, more broadly popular encyclopedias in other countries, such as *Encyclopedia Britannica* in England during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (92-93).



Image 2.3. *Madame de Pompadour in Her Study* by Maurice Quentin de La Tour (1755) (Public Domain). The first book from the left is the *Encyclopédie*.

Over the centuries, encyclopedias of different forms have been theorized as having several principles: namely, as a compilation and depository of all the knowledge known at the time in the West, to educate the public, and to organize that knowledge, but never, specifically, to ensure representation or diverse content coverage. The first principle, to compile information, is by far the most common across theorists of encyclopedism; for example, Wales, Sanger, Diderot, and the editors of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* have each stated in some way that the purpose of an encyclopedia is to compile knowledge. Charles

Van Doren, on the other hand, argues that the compilation and dissemination of information is a secondary concern; the purpose of an encyclopedia, he states, is to educate. Writing in the early 1960s, amid the popular explosion of inexpensive, at-home American encyclopedia sets like the *World Book*, Van Doran takes the opportunity, while discussing the *Encyclopédie française*, to criticize American encyclopedias for not living up to the ideal of what he thinks encyclopedias should be, as he felt the *Encyclopédie française* did. For example, he considers the *Encyclopédie française* to be both a reference and a work of art because since it is structured thematically, it strives to unify and connect its content, something encyclopedias structured like dictionaries, like most American encyclopedias, could never do. I suspect that even though out of necessity, Wikipedia is structured thematically, he would not have called Wikipedia a work of art, for a work of art, he believes, is meant to be read, even if it is educational. On the other hand, Robert Collison, author of *Encyclopaedias: Their History Throughout the Ages* (1966), theorizes that the encyclopedia is a book that is never actually read, stating, "...We have all sat down to read an encyclopaedia at one time or another, but it is doubtful whether anyone has ever completed a thorough reading of any modern compilation of this nature" (1). This is certainly true about Wikipedia; it is impossible to read all 6.5 million articles in the English language version of Wikipedia. In 2015, however, artist and Wikipedia editor and activist Michael Mandiberg, as a part of a project that was featured in an exhibition at a gallery in the Lower East Side of New York City, made it possible for the English-language version of Wikipedia to be published, thus forcing something essentially virtually heterotrophic into physical space. Potentially, if Maniberg's project was all printed out, it would consist of 7,600 volumes. Each volume consisted of 700 pages and, available on the print-on-demand website

Lulu.com, was sold for \$80 each (Schuessler). In chapter three of this thesis, I will discuss some of the dilemmas those of us who are working on the seemingly impossible to overcome problem of the gender gap and systemic bias on Wikipedia and how individual editors and organized groups can help solve it. As Stephen Ramsey says while discussing the impossibility of reading all the books ever written, “*Way* too many books, *way* too little time” (111, emphasis in original). There is a reason why these efforts have seemed like a drop in the bucket when compared to the whole of Wikipedia; it is.

Collison, who like Van Doran was writing during the heyday of the publication of bound encyclopedias, viewed the selling of encyclopedias to the general public as a “buy one get one free” type of scam, which he claimed began 2,000 years ago with Pliny’s encyclopedia, to get people to purchase books about topics they have no interest in and would never read. He might as well have been referring to Wikipedians when he said that the compilers of encyclopedias throughout history “must have expended considerable effort in producing entries on minor subjects which not one of their readers has ever the inclination or occasion to consult” (2). As epistemologist Dan Fallis states, however, even if one of encyclopedists’ main objectives is to make money, as he insinuates is the reason behind the publication of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, or in the case of Wikipedians, for enjoyment purposes, it does not mean that building a high-quality encyclopedia is not also an important, ancillary goal (1662-1663).³ As someone familiar with Wikipedia and as someone who finds creative output and enjoyment by contributing to it, I disagree with Van Doren that an encyclopedia, even one organized alphabetically, cannot be both a reference and a work of art. Encyclopedic writing is simply a genre of literature, like academic writing, with its own rules and conventions. While it is true that there are plenty of encyclopedic articles (within

and outside of Wikipedia) that are badly written, there are also plenty of encyclopedic articles, online and off, that not only serve as high-quality references but are well-written and artistic.⁴

Todorović adds a third purpose of the encyclopedia, specifically, of the *Encyclopédie*, which, as we saw earlier, was structured like a dictionary: to “rationally organize” (91) knowledge. Collison, who focuses a great deal of attention on how encyclopedias throughout history have been structured, claims that encyclopedias have been organized in three ways: systematically, alphabetically by broad subjects, and alphabetically by specific subjects. According to Collison, the systematic method, which prevailed during the encyclopedia’s early history and for hundreds of years, is most satisfying to scholars because it connects related topics to each other but it also assumes that encyclopedias would be read as a whole, requires high-quality indexes, and is not helpful for readers who want to make quick references to specific topics. The alphabetic methods were established later, during the 18th century (3). Obviously, it is impossible for Wikipedia, due to its online format, to be organized alphabetically. When Michael Mandiberg printed it out in books for his art project, however, he chose to organize them alphabetically, although not before the 91-volume table of contents that listed the 6.5 million articles that existed at the time, the 500 volumes with entries beginning with numbers and typographical symbols, and the 36-volume contributors index (Schuessler).

Wikipedia, due to its hypertextual nature, must instead be organized in Collison’s first and oldest method, systematically, or by categories, fitting Todorović’s requirement that encyclopedias be organized rationally, so perhaps Van Doran would consider it a work of art after all. The central goal of Wikipedia’s complex category system “is to provide

navigational links to Wikipedia pages in a hierarchy of categories which readers, knowing essential—defining—characteristics of a topic, can browse and quickly find sets of pages on topics that are defined by those characteristics” (“WP:Categorization”). In other words, Wikipedia categories help readers find articles. Much of this categorization is done by hand, by Wikipedia’s volunteer editors, such as the editor who initiated the aforementioned “categorygate” incident in 2013 and are listed at the bottom of every Wikipedia article. I am unaware of any research about the categorization of obscure and neglected topics on Wikipedia, but they likely suffer from the same issues as articles with insufficient hyperlinks connecting them to other articles, as noted in my earlier discussion of Tripoldi’s study of the gendered networking of Wikipedia articles. I argue, then, that insufficient categorization of these articles, including insufficient linking, results in less attention drawn to biographies about women, female-centric articles, and obscure topics, and like under-linked articles, increasing the danger of threats of their deletion, resulting in the less likelihood of these articles being read, edited, and improved over time.

The screenshot shows the bottom portion of a Wikipedia article. At the top, there are three navigation tabs: "V · T · E" (with a dropdown arrow), "Fred Rogers and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*" (the active tab), and "[show]". Below these are two more tabs: "Awards for Fred Rogers" and "Authority control", both with "[show]" links.

The main content area contains a list of categories for the article, each with a link to a list of related items. The categories include:

- Categories (+): Fred Rogers (-) (±) | 1928 births (-) (±) | 2003 deaths (-) (±) | 20th-century American composers (-) (±) | 20th-century American male actors (-) (±) | 20th-century American male writers (-) (±) | 20th-century American singers (-) (±) | 20th-century Presbyterians (-) (±) | 21st-century Presbyterians (-) (±) | American children's television presenters (-) (±) | American male composers (-) (±) | American male singers (-) (±) | American male songwriters (-) (±) | American male television actors (-) (±) | American male voice actors (-) (±) | American philanthropists (-) (±) | American Presbyterian ministers (-) (±) | American Presbyterians (-) (±) | American puppeteers (-) (±) | American television hosts (-) (±) | Burials in Pennsylvania (-) (±) | Christianity in Pittsburgh (-) (±) | Columbia Records artists (-) (±) | Dartmouth College alumni (-) (±) | Daytime Emmy Award winners (-) (±) | Deaths from cancer in Pennsylvania (-) (±) | Deaths from stomach cancer (-) (±) | Male actors from Pittsburgh (-) (±) | Omnivore Recordings artists (-) (±) | PBS people (-) (±) | Peabody Award winners (-) (±) | Pennsylvania Republicans (-) (±) | People from Latrobe, Pennsylvania (-) (±) | Pittsburgh Theological Seminary alumni (-) (±) | Presbyterians from Pennsylvania (-) (±) | Presidential Medal of Freedom recipients (-) (±) | Rollins College alumni (-) (±) | Singers from Pennsylvania (-) (±) | Songwriters from Pennsylvania (-) (±) | Television personalities from Pittsburgh (-) (±) | Television producers from Pennsylvania (-) (±) | United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America ministers (-) (±) | Vegetarianism activists (-) (±) | Writers from Pittsburgh (-) (±) | (+)

Below the category list, there is a timestamp: "This page was last edited on 17 February 2022, at 15:23." This is followed by a Creative Commons license notice: "Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License 3.0; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization." At the bottom, there are links for "Privacy policy", "About Wikipedia", "Disclaimers", "Contact Wikipedia", "Mobile view", "Developers", "Statistics", and "Cookie statement". On the right side, there are logos for "WIKIMEDIA project" and "Powered by MediaWiki".

Image 2.4. Screenshot of the bottom of the Wikipedia article “Fred Rogers,” including its category list.

One might imagine that Jimmy Wales' and Larry Sanger's original organizational solution of making their online encyclopedia less of a Raymond-esque "cathedral" and more of a "bazaar," would have avoided these issues—but, as I will suggest, they have instead largely aggravated the problem. Ward Cunningham's "wiki" technology ("wiki" being a Hawaiian word meaning "quick"), or a website that anyone could edit, is what Wales and Sanger would later transition Nupedia into. One feature of wikis that proved to be the source of their later success is that the webpages that users create, edit, and hyperlink to other pages have an unlimited version history; as Amy Bruckman put it, "if someone makes a change you don't like, you can revert to any of the previous versions of the page. You can let people edit freely, because anything can be undone" (35). In other words, you cannot "break" sites like Wikipedia that use wiki technology, which quickens production by allowing editors to work on articles simultaneously; at first, the idea was for editors to add entries that would later be fed into Nupedia, but that idea was quickly abandoned because their expert volunteers did not support it. Content on the wiki expanded exponentially and quickly, so Wales and Sanger chose to make the openly edited version "the real version" (Bruckman 35) and in early 2001, they reserved the domain name "Wikipedia." By the end of January, they had only seventeen articles over 200 characters long, but by the end of the year, 15,000 articles had been published and a growing community of 350 "Wikipedians" had joined their cause (Poe).

In the mid-2000s, the Wikipedia movement had to overcome a crisis of sorts, which Tom Simonite of the *MIT Technology Review* argues caused a decline in the quality and trustworthiness of Wikipedia, and which in turn caused a significant decline in participation. As Wikipedia's influence grew, there were attacks from academia and the popular press regarding the vandalism that plagued the site and almost became out of control; the editing

community's response was to create thousands of words worth of policies and procedures, new editing tools, bureaucratic procedures, and automated bots, or software that quickly surveyed recent changes and revert them while admonishing (or "warning") the vandals that added inappropriate changes with a single mouse click. The new measures worked, resulting in less vandalism, and helping Wikipedia improve its quality and scope (Simonite). By early 2022, Wikipedia has grown into the world's largest online reference, with as of November 2021, 1.7 billion "unique-device visitors monthly," over 58 million articles in over 300 languages, including 6.5 million articles in the English version, and almost 132,000 active contributors, who are defined as editors who have made at least one edit in the previous month ("WP:About"). The measures that resulted in such great successes, however, also resulted in unintended negative consequences. As Simonite put it, "Newcomers to Wikipedia making their first, tentative edits—and the inevitable mistakes—became less likely to stick around. Being steamrollered by the newly efficient, impersonal editing machine was no fun" (Simonite). This dynamic likely informs another unintended negative consequence, one that may seem odd in an online, hypertextual environment with seemingly endless space for content; namely, the underrepresentation of biographies about women and female-centric topics.

As Don Fallis writes in his 2008 article analyzing Wikipedia's epistemology, the site should not be successful, for all kinds of reasons, including its crowd-sourced nature. Although Fallis states that there have been other open-sourced projects that have succeeded, such as the development of the computer programming language *Linux* or the Great Internet Mersenne Prime Search (allowing anyone with an Intel Pentium processor to participate in the search for the largest known prime numbers), a crowd-sourced encyclopedia should not

have been as successful. As Fallis asks, “It seems unlikely that a million people working together could write a very good novel, but are a million people working together likely to compile a good encyclopedia?” (1662). Fallis fails to take into account, however, that although millions of people have contributed to Wikipedia, there are fewer than 132,000 active editors, and I would imagine that a substantial minority of active editors contribute regularly. While this number is still large, it makes the goal of Wikipedia more manageable. Additionally, a million people have not worked on any one article. An interesting study would be to analyze the contributors of popular articles to ascertain how many editors have contributed to a substantial percentage of them. For example, “Lists of Deaths by Year” (and its corresponding sub-articles) tend to be one of the most well-read articles on Wikipedia. One of its subpages, “Deaths in 2021” was viewed over 35.4 million times by early 2022; three editors, one of which was an unregistered user, contributed to a little over 76% of the article and as of early April 2022, only 22 editors had contributed to it (WP:2021).

A million people may not be able to compile the highest quality encyclopedia, something that may or may not have contributed to the gender gap, but a committee of 20 people most likely can. Some of the more obscure articles, like ones that I worked on for the 1000 Women in Religion WikiProject, have even fewer contributors. For example, the first article about a female saint I created, “Agatha Kwon Chin-i,” a mid-19th century Korean saint and martyr, has six other contributors; my contributions have totaled almost 95% of the total article (“Agatha Kwon Chin-i”). To Fallis’ credit, however, as I have already stated, he argued that there are other ways to gauge Wikipedia’s success, not just building a high-quality encyclopedia. He suggests that Wikipedia has also been successful at building an online community (1663), although it is stated Wikipedia policy that the site is not a social

media site like Facebook or Twitter (“WP:What Wikipedia is Not”). Bruckman, though not an epistemologist like Fallis, states that Wikipedia is an example of social constructivism in its knowledge and content-building and argues that all scientific knowledge is socially constructed, since it takes sometimes centuries for scientific results to be verified, by dozens of scientists conducting hundreds of experiments, over sometimes long periods of time. She argues that “Constructivists like [Bruno] Latour and [Stephen] Woolgar argue that objective truth does not exist independent of a human in a social context who knows that truth in a particular moment in time” (75). Her answer to Fallis’ question about whether or not a large group of people can build a high-quality encyclopedia, which she called “peer production” (61), would be that they could, since not only has it been done over and over again in the sciences, but it is also the only effective way to create an encyclopedia the size and scope of Wikipedia. Volunteers who work on a peer production project like Wikipedia self-select tasks that match their interests and capabilities, which “can help make better use of human creativity and effort” (62).

For Bruckman, one of the things that has made Wikipedia so successful is its social aspect. The labor in encyclopedia-building on Wikipedia is done by volunteers, so tasks must be divided into small, modular chunks, which allow its participants to contribute based upon their expertise, interests, and availability. Wikipedia was organized by its early users and leaders, including Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger, for individual contributions to be easily integrated into a functioning whole, which encouraged its growth. As I state above, a relatively small group of Wikipedia users contribute and an even smaller group does most of the content-building, although even short-time participants play an important role (62). For example, as I stated in chapter one of this thesis, I have a relatively low edit count because as

a Wikipedia editor, I have tended to concentrate on creating and improving individual articles, which take longer but reflect my interests as a researcher and writer. The founders of Art+Feminism write in *Wikipedia @ 20* that edit counts do not accurately measure the success of individuals or projects because it fails to consider other kinds of labor on Wikipedia, such as community-building, organizing other editors outside of Wikipedia, giving presentations and writing about the Wikipedia movement, and conducting edit-a-thons.

Art+Feminism's founders, who call themselves "metapedians" because of this specialized kind of work, characterize these phenomena "gendered labor" because they encourage the work of others, involve "the invisible labor of 'making of the home'" as much of women's labor has since the Industrial Revolution, and "resemble a re-inscription of a traditional hierarchy of gendered labor" (Evans et al). Evans and her colleagues also call the labor they do as organizers and activists "emotional or affective labor" (Evans et al). The definition of the term "emotional labor" has evolved since it was first used by Arlie R. Hochschild in 1983. Hochschild defined it as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*" (7, emphasis in original); Evans and her colleagues employ an expanded definition, to denote any kind of labor outside of editing that does not get recognition or credit. For his part, Michael Mandiberg—one of the co-authors of the chapter in *Wikipedia @ 20*, a co-founder of Art+Feminism, and the artist who created the printed version of Wikipedia—calls it "the labor of being afraid" (Evans et al). As Evans et al. state, it is "the labor of organizing that so often keeps the Art+Feminism team from the labor of editing. And this labor is gendered" (Evans et al). Their definition of emotional labor is closer to

Hochschild's original definition in that the kind of gendered labor they engage in is as critical and necessary for the growth and development of the larger project as active editing is, and it, like other kinds of gendered and emotional labor, is not as valued in the larger Wikipedia community. The problem with emotional labor, as Hochschild stated, is that it disconnects the laborer from their emotions (8), which has implications for those who labor for Wikipedia as activists and contributors.

Evans and her colleagues believe that the gendered and emotional labor that they and others do to support the Wikipedia movement in different ways than active editing should be recognized and celebrated. The work of Arts+Feminism demonstrates that there are other ways to contribute to Wikipedia, and they do not always result in large edit counts. Yet the co-founders of Art+Feminism have stated that even their most active advocates, due to their low edit counts, are not considered active Wikipedians (Evans et al). Women and groups of marginalized people, who may live in the global South with unpredictable internet and electricity connections, tend to have lower edit counts for all kinds of reasons (Vrana et al). As Adele Godoy Vrana and her colleagues state in their chapter in *Wikipedia @ 20*: "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" (Vrana et al).

The solution could be to publish one's work more often, as I did after I realized that the editing community valued high edit counts. Before that, I thought it was ridiculous to save my work so often, so I would, once I discovered them, compose in sandboxes, Wikipedia pages that editors use to draft articles, and save every paragraph or so. After

several years of active editing, I finally discovered the strategy of publishing my work as often as I could, in the fashion of my fellow members of the 1000 Women in Religion WikiProject, most of whom live in the global North as I do, who are active in the Wikipedia movement, and also have lower edit counts. For those of us in the Global North, however, this strategy is an effective one because as Vrana and her colleagues reminds us, the labor of women on Wikipedia tends to be more highly scrutinized (Vrana) and editors from underrepresented groups are more likely to have experienced some of the severe harassment and microaggressions Evans and her colleagues describe in *Wikipedia @ 20* (Evans et al). Women also tend to publish more words in fewer edits than men do (Vrana).

Large edit counts are not the only thing that gives an editor credibility on Wikipedia; so does subjecting oneself and the articles one writes to Wikipedia's often rigorous peer review system. Fallis argues that Wikipedia's peer review system is an incentive for volunteers to contribute to Wikipedia, although I am not sure his argument is confirmed by the numbers. Featured articles (or "FAs") are considered some of Wikipedia's best articles, "as determined by Wikipedia's editors" (WP:Featured Articles) and are labelled by a bronze star icon placed on the upper right-hand corner of the article on non-mobile versions of the website. They are reviewed by other editors according to a strict criterion for accuracy, neutrality, completeness, and style. Out of almost 6.5 million articles on the English-language version of Wikipedia, a little over 6,000 have been categorized as FAs (about 0.09%, or one out of every 1,060 articles) (WP:Featured Articles). Good articles (or "GAs") meet "a core set of editorial standards" (Wikipedia:Good Articles), but are rated lower than FAs, and are labelled with a small green plus-sign inside a circle, also placed at the upper right-hand corner of the article. If working on an article reviewed as either an FA or a GA

were an incentive to contribute to Wikipedia, there would likely be more of them, despite the long queue of articles waiting to be reviewed, especially for articles eligible to be GAs.

Despite Fallis' and others' concerns about the reliability and accuracy of Wikipedia, the site has proven, as we have already seen, to be strongly reliable and accurate, even articles that have not been reviewed as stringently as FAs or GAs. Bruckman goes as far as to argue that "Wikipedia is sometimes the most reliable publication ever created—and other times not so at all," going on to state, "*It depends on the article*" (79, emphasis in original). As she points out, people with a traditional view of credibility and authority tend to be suspicious of Wikipedia, even when there is evidence of its reliability and accuracy, and those who hold "positivist, techno-utopian view of the transformative potential of technology" (80) tend to be more supportive of Wikipedia, again even when faced with the unfortunate realities of the gender gap and systemic bias. I agree with Bruckman that the reliability and accuracy of Wikipedia depends upon the article. In her book *Should You Believe Wikipedia?* (2022), she reminds us that even articles in well-received academic and scientific journals are reviewed by three experts, at the most, while the most popular Wikipedia articles can be reviewed by hundreds of volunteers and unlike most journals, are updated regularly (Bruckman 80-82). At the same time, though, less popular articles are not checked, viewed, and reviewed as often, so as one would expect, they are not as reliable or accurate. Fallis agrees, citing the "wisdom of crowds" concept, which states that large groups tend to be "extremely reliable" (1670) as a possible explanation for Wikipedia's reliability and accuracy. Fallis stated that for the crowd's wisdom to be accurate, it must be large, independent, and diverse (1670). While Wikipedia is large and independent, we have already seen that in many ways it is not always diverse.

In the next section of this thesis, I discuss what has been done by individual editors and organized groups to solve this seemingly unsolvable problem, some of the challenges editors face in researching and creating content about obscure and underrepresented topics, and how editors and activists can use the policies that have both caused and exacerbated the problem. As my mentor Adrienne Wadewitz puts it, it takes all of us to mitigate the serious problems of the gender gap and systemic bias on Wikipedia. Since my subject is the genre of the encyclopedia, specifically Wikipedia, I will do a close reading of several interesting Wikipedia articles to help illustrate my arguments.

CHAPTER THREE:

“Female Saints, Figure Skating, and Rebecca Cox Jackson:

Knowing and Using Wikipedia Policies”

In May 2020, I was bored. It was at the tail-end of the lockdown period of the COVID-19 outbreak; my children, who are both severely developmentally disabled, had just spent a large part of their school year on Zoom, which as you can imagine, did not always go well. My husband and I, by necessity, had taken over 100% of their care, which was difficult and stressful. One of the ways I used to cope with the stress and uncertainty was to do a deep dive into editing and contributing to Wikipedia. I noticed that many WikiProjects were conducting online edit-a-thons, or events where Wikipedia editors meet to edit and improve articles. Often, these events are focused on a specific topic or type of content and include training for basic editing for new editors (Edit-a-thon). Edit-a-thons are also one of the ways that WikiProjects and other groups have attempted to mitigate the effects of the gender gap and systemic bias on Wikipedia, including recruiting more diverse editors and organizing groups to write women and other groups back into history. WikiProject Art+Feminism, for example, has conducted edit-a-thons all over the world since 2014, including about 140 in 2016 (Lavin).

I attended my first virtual edit-a-thon conducted by the 1000 Women in Religion WikiProject in May 2020 and decided the best way I could assist with their efforts was to create and improve articles about female saints, a topic I have a great deal of personal interest in and wanted to learn more about. I also became, due to my many years of experience, one of the resident editing experts of the group and found great personal satisfaction in training

other members. Since joining 1000 Women in Religion, I have found another niche as an editor, have made real contributions to mitigating not only the gender gap but a significant content gap, and have created, improved, and expanded over 40 (mostly small) articles about obscure female saints. I learned many things along the way, not only about the inspirational women who were willing to give up everything, often including their own lives and become martyrs for their religious faith, to gain self-agency and follow their own way, even if it meant rebelling against the status quo and the desires and requirements of their families, societies, and governments, both secular and religious. I became a better researcher, learning how to find obscure sources about these often-obscure figures, many of whom are dangerously close to being lost to history.

In the fall of 2020, I was accepted into the English MA program at the University of Idaho. One of the things attending graduate school did for me was to crystalize an already formed but informal philosophy of editing for Wikipedia and help me to formulate a theoretical framework of Wikipedia studies. It also opened my eyes to how writing for the genre of the encyclopedia made me both a scholar and an artist. Two other courses, in narratology and prosody, crystalized my theories about the encyclopedia's importance as a literary genre and how I, as an editor, could use it as my primary expression of creativity, despite its strict forms. In the spring of 2021, I took a course at the University of Idaho from Zachary Turpin, who would later become my main professor, which has largely informed my theoretical and practical philosophies about Wikipedia studies. Turpin's class was about "odd literature" (or "odd lit"), a term he coined for the course, which he defines as "*Sui generis* books [and sources] that are so one-of-a-kind, so off-the-beaten-track, that they don't seem to fit in any genre, any literary movement or period, or even within 'literature' as a category"

(Turpin). Turpin's specialty is 19th century American literature, so we studied 19th century odd lit from more well-known authors like Whitman and Melville, as well as more obscure authors like Swedish theologian and philosopher Emmanuel Swedenborg and African American Shaker elder Rebecca Cox Jackson. As Turpin put it, "Odd lit is the literary Island of Misfit Toys, often judged 'anomalies,' but are in fact illustrative (in their far-out way) of 19th-century American literature's engagement with norms and norm-breaking, during a time of radical sociopolitical, philosophical, and psychological discovery" (Turpin). I found, unlike many of my classmates who struggled with the works we studied due to their oddities and norm-breaking, a familiarity with much of the material because I had studied similar sources researching the obscure female saints I had studied and written about for Wikipedia the previous year and while improving articles about the sport of figure skating since 2018.

I consider the "Piracy" article vandalism vignette I relate in this thesis' Introduction, in addition to being one of the ways in which as a new editor, I was inducted into the Wikipedia editing community, as one of my first interactions with the kind of the reading and research I have tended to do as a Wikipedia editor. It has been my experience that having a wide base of knowledge of what I call useless pieces of information, the kind of information that can be classified in Turpin's loosely defined genre of odd literature, is useful. Additionally, it can be argued that Wikipedia is a 21st century example of odd literature, albeit something that most of us are now familiar with, since it has made millions of Wikipedia users skilled readers of the genre of encyclopedic writing. Although the concept of odd lit is a made-up construct, I have found it helpful in developing a philosophy and a theoretical framework about creating content for Wikipedia, especially as it relates to some of the articles I have researched, written, and expanded. I believe that due to the

uncategorizable nature of much of the sources that support the content of these articles, the concept of odd literature is helpful when developing a plan for how to locate and use the research conducted about other obscure topics on Wikipedia.

A good case study for the use of odd lit to increase content about women on Wikipedia is Rebecca Cox Jackson, the free Black religious activist and writer who lived during the early 19th century. Jackson was also an elder with the Shakers, a Protestant denomination founded in the mid-1700s known for their egalitarian ideals. When we studied Jackson in Turpin's class, I looked at her Wikipedia biography, as I do for most new things I encounter, and found that it, like Maya Angelou's before 2008, was also woefully inadequate. It was short, at only 302 words, but it was unclear at the time if its brevity was due to lack of comprehensiveness or if it was short because of a lack of reliable sources available. Even if there were a lack of reliable sources about Jackson, it was clear that the prose needed improvement. If I were not the busy graduate student that I was, I would have taken on Jackson's biography and done the research necessary to expand it and make it more comprehensive. Fortunately for me and for the world at large, I did not have to do as much research as Jackson's biography warranted, for in the Fall of 2021, "Rebecca Cox Jackson" was an article assigned to a student editor at the University of Alberta, for a 300-level course in Feminist History, supported by Wiki Education. The student discovered what I had suspected: that the brevity of Jackson's biography on Wikipedia, like Maya Angelou's, was due to a lack of comprehensiveness. In other words, also like Angelou's biography, not enough editors had focused their attention on it, and that it had suffered from the same issues that Angelou's articles had before I dedicated myself to improving them.

en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Rebecca_Cox_Jackson&oldid=1005530362

WIKIPEDIA
The Free Encyclopedia

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

[restore this version]
This is an old revision of this page, as edited by Citation bot (talk | contribs) at 04:12, 8 February 2021 (Misc citation tidying). You can use this bot yourself. Report bugs here. | Suggested by Abductive | Category:African-American Methodists | via #UCB_Category 12/68. The present address (URL) is a permanent link to this revision, which may differ significantly from the current revision. (diff) — Previous revision | Latest revision (diff) | Newer revision — (diff)

Rebecca Cox Jackson (1795–1871) was a free Black woman, best known for her religious activism and for her autobiography.

Biography

Rebecca Cox was born on February 15, 1795 in Hornstown, Pennsylvania^[1] into a free family.^[2] She married Samuel S. Jackson and worked as a seamstress until she had a religious awakening during a thunderstorm in 1830. She began preaching in her community and attained a following of men and women, and criticism of established churches. She got divorced after her husband failed to teach her to read and write, and later realized she was able to do both anyway.^[3] Around this time she met her lifelong companion Rebecca Perot. Both women continued to have visions, even appearing in each other's visions. Perot said in one of her visions that Jackson was "crowned King and me crowned Queen of Africa," while Jackson saw the two of them "unit[ing] in the covenant." The two women were together for thirty-five years, until Jackson's death.^[3]

While traveling from church to church, she came upon and decided to join the *Shakers in Watervliet, New York*.^[2] She became a minister in that community, but left with Perot after experiencing racial discrimination.^[3] Jackson and Perot moved to Philadelphia where in 1859 Jackson established a Shaker group primarily ministering to Black women.^{[3][4]} She and Perot went back to Watervliet for a year, and then returned to Philadelphia where Jackson continued as Eldress of her family of Shakers until her death in 1871.^[2] She is buried in Eden Cemetery in Collingdale, Pennsylvania.^[5] After Jackson's death, Perot took the name Rebecca Jackson, Jr., and continued in her partner's role of leader of the Shaker group.^[3] The Black Shaker community in Philadelphia continued to exist as late as 1908.^[2]

Her autobiography, although written between 1830 and 1864, was only published in 1991.^[6]

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Authority control hide

Image 3.1. Screenshot of “Rebecca Cox Jackson” the version of Jackson’s biography as of February 2021. Notice that the older version is short enough (302 words) for the screenshot to capture the article in its entirety.

While it is true that Jackson is more obscure and less well known than Angelou, it is clear from the student editor’s research that Jackson had more than enough notability to warrant a longer and more comprehensive biography about her on Wikipedia. The student’s submission was a good effort; they added almost 1,300 words, making it almost four times longer, replaced most of the unreliable references with more reliable ones, and improved the prose. After their course ended and after informing the student editor of my intentions on their talk page, a typical and expected practice, I spent part of my semester break in early January 2022 further improving it by conducting some clean-up of the article, meaning that I corrected some sourcing and formatting errors, did a better job of “mining the sources,” or better utilizing the information about Jackson in them, and tightened up the prose. This case is an excellent example of the kind of collaboration that can and should happen among Wikipedia editors. There is much more work that can be done to further improve Jackson’s

biography, something that is on my informal Wikipedia editing “to-do list.” I also believe that additional articles could be created about Jackson, including one about her spiritual memoir, *Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson, Black Visionary, Shaker Eldress*, one of the sources we studied in Turpin’s course at the University of Idaho. Content about Jackson’s influence on Shakerism could also be added to articles about how African Americans influenced Shakerism and other Protestant movements during the early 19th century.

Not only were there similarities with my experience with Rebecca Cox Jackson’s biography on Wikipedia to writing articles about Maya Angelou, but there were also similarities with my experiences writing about obscure female saints. The major difference, however, was that unlike Jackson and Angelou’s biographies, it is more difficult to locate reliable secondary sources about the saints I have written about. Fortunately, however, I was able to consult a list of saints that had been curated by another member of the 1000 Women in Religion WikiProject (“WP:Saints”). Part of my duties I took on was going through the list, removing duplicate names, and doing cursory research (conducting searches in academic journals, Google Scholar, even general searches on Google) and to see if I could find enough information and sources to warrant the existence of a Wikipedia article about them. (It was an often-painful experience to remove saints from the list when I was unable to make a case for their notability.) When I was able to find enough sources, I either created or expanded articles about them; by April 2022, over 40 biographies, mostly shorter articles that have been classified as “stubs,” which is “an article deemed too short to provide encyclopedic coverage of a subject” (“WP:Stub”). An article is labelled as a stub for two reasons: there is not enough information about the subject to warrant that it be longer, or that it needs

expansion and improvement. The goal was to create new articles and add enough sources and content to existing ones to prevent their deletion. I found that most of the articles on the list need improvement, often in major and significant ways.

More work needs to be done to mitigate the content gap about female saints and other women spiritual and religious leaders focused on by the 1000 Women in Religion WikiProject. As I have said before, at times it seems an overwhelming and daunting task; quoting Stephen Ramsay again, “*Way* too many books, *way* too little time” (111, emphasis in original), although he might or might not have been quoting musician Frank Zappa, something Ramsay was unsure of because as he states in “The Hermeneutics of Screwing Around; or What You Do with a Million Books” (2014), there are too many books out there to read and to consult to know anything for certain. He states, “There has never been a time when philosophers— lovers of wisdom broadly understood—have not exhibited profound regret over the impedance of mismatch between time and truth. For surely, there are more books, more ideas, more experiences, and more relationships worth having than there are hours in a day (or days in a lifetime)” (111).

While it is true that women have been systematically written out of history, and as a consequence, there are often no reliable and trustworthy sources to support their contributions, I have come to the conclusion that much of the challenges Wikipedia editors and scholars in other fields must overcome is that many of the sources are obscure and difficult to find. In other words, they exist, as I have suggested previously, often in other forms of knowledge-building and do not fulfill the requirements of many Wikipedia policies because they are not the traditional forms of knowledge that Enlightenment-era institutions like Wikipedia value. Additionally, Ramsay has helped me see that it may not be the case

that these sources, even the secondary sources Wikipedia requires, do not exist, but that they, by their status as part of the genre of odd literature, are difficult to locate. Consequently, I believe that like many scholars in fields seeking to write women and other misrepresented groups back into history, Wikipedia editors need to gain the research skills to locate them. The 1000 Women in Religion WikiProject, as we have already seen, is tackling this challenge by creating secondary sources in the general scholarship about them; in other words, if a woman religious is not included in Wikipedia due to her lack of notability, then the WikiProject will create her notability by teaming with organizations like the American Academy of Religion by publishing reliable, secondary sources about her.

Ramsay's essay, which focuses on the dilemmas of conducting research when there is too much to read, has implications for editors seeking to help mitigate the gender gap and systemic bias on Wikipedia. He states that there are two ways to conduct research: searching and browsing. According to Ramsay, searching is, if one were to do research in a library, having a topic and various research strategies in mind for locating sources about it, such as using a catalogue, a bibliography, and assistance from librarians. In this age of the internet, we have additional tools such as search engines like Google and if one is fortunate to be connected to a university library, JSTOR. I am not sure that Wikipedia would have been as successful without these research tools provided by the internet, in this age when "googling" has become a verb. Browsing, on the other hand, is, as Ramsay puts it, is "a completely different activity" (115) than searching and occurs when "I walk into the library and wander around in a state of insouciant boredom" (114). Ramsay calls browsing "screwing around," in which one does not know what one is looking for but has "a bundle of interests and proclivities" (115).

I strongly connected with Ramsay's description of the process of searching and browsing because I regularly do both activities when researching the articles I write for Wikipedia. Based upon my experience researching female saints for Wikipedia, however, I would add another research technique to the two Ramsay discusses: "stumbling across," which I would define as finding sources for one topic while researching another. Most of the sources I have found for the articles about female saints were found while researching other saints. For example, I discovered the 1988 essay "Female Sanctity: Public and Private Roles, ca. 500—1100" by medieval scholar Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, which has direct applications to my discussion about the use of hagiographies as a historical source in this thesis, while doing research for a saint biography. It also matches how I became involved with writing and improving articles about Maya Angelou (Maya Angelou, *Caged Bird*). Before coming across her biography and the article about *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, I knew little about her. I had read *Caged Bird* in high school, which made an impact on me, saw her recite her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" during Bill Clinton's first inauguration in 1993, and viewed her appearances on Oprah Winfrey's show (Angelou was Winfrey's mentor), but that was the extent of my knowledge about her. Like the vandalism I discovered on "Piracy," I cannot tell you how I stumbled upon Angelou's articles, but it was very much like Ramsay describes: I was bored, as I was when I serendipitously discovered female saints in 2020, and was "screwing around," looking for something to do on Wikipedia, and seven years later, I became the preeminent expert about Angelou on Wikipedia. I became a published author and became inspired to continue studying literature in graduate school. My experience demonstrates that all three techniques are valid ways to conduct research for obscure and underrepresented topics on Wikipedia.

I also discovered, while researching and writing about female saints, the value of the hagiography, volumes similar to encyclopedias that been used by the Christian Church throughout its history to record saints; often they are simply lists of names, but they often also include short biographies, as Agnes Baillie Cunninghame Dunbar's two-volume *A Dictionary of Sainly Women* (1904), which despite its odd literature status, proved to be an invaluable resource because it focuses only on women and covers most of the history of the Church, although it has its limitations, including its age, archaic sensibility, and use of language. It, unlike many other sources, was easy to locate because it was already listed in dozens of saint biographies on Wikipedia, probably because it has been in the public domain for several years. I have used other hagiographies, about both male and female saints, published by different denominations and publishing houses, some more established, like Duke University Press, and other less trustworthy ones. like ones on denomination and parish websites.⁵ Many hagiographies, especially older ones like Dunbar's, due to their unconventional use in rewriting women back into history, especially the history of the Middle Ages, can be placed within the genre of odd literature. I have also used other obscure and difficult to locate sources, depending upon the saint and the period.⁶

Historians, according to Schulenburg, discredited the historical value of hagiographies until the late 1960s, since they are full of "fantasy and contradiction" (103) due to their "edifying intention" (103). Schulenburg suggests, however, that hagiographies are good sources for writing women, especially female saints, back into history. She states, while recognizing the difficulties they present for the historian, that hagiographies "provide a solid core of social and personal detail not found in any other documentation" (103), hold remarkable potential for social historians, and are "invaluable for historians of medieval

women” (103), since many of the latter are also neglected on Wikipedia. Compared to other sources written in the Middle Ages, which can be frustratingly silent about women, hagiographies pay a great deal of attention to medieval women, especially their roles in the Christian Church and in society at large. Hagiographies also demonstrate the complex attitudes towards women at the time and provide historians with the opportunity to compare the roles of men and women in the Early Modern Era. Schulenberg also states, “A collective study of saints’ lives thus provides enough information to form a rather crude but accurate evaluation of the status of women in medieval society and specifically within the religious community” (103), which can be of great use to those who want to increase content about female saints on Wikipedia.

Schulenberg studied over 2,200 male and female saints listed in the *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, a 12-volume hagiographic text published after Vatican II, focusing on changes in styles of what Schulenberg calls the sanctity (or holiness) of female saints who lived between 500 and 1100. Unlike today, saints of this period were not canonized, an often long, complicated, and strenuous process, but were popularly chosen and recognized by their peers, who were often members of informal and local pressure groups that made up a local cult of the saints’ followers. These early saints were not promoted by specific orders, popes, or the church hierarchy, but instead reflected “the popular collective religious mentality of the period” (103). Schulenberg, in her study comparing male and female saints, found that the decline in the promotion of women to sainthood during the Early Middle Ages indirectly corresponded to a progressive deterioration of the status of women and their active roles in the Church (104). Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, in her marvelous book *The Care of Nuns: The Ministries of Benedictine Women in England During the Central Middle Ages* (2019), about

how women were able to co-opt leadership responsibilities in convents in England during the Middle Ages, and the documents that recorded it, found the inverse to be true in her study of female monastic leaders in the early Middle Ages and the hagiographies and documents that recorded their duties and responsibilities. Bugyis writes these noble women used their wealth, power, and position to ensure the survival of the convents and monasteries under their care; as she put it, “as primary agents of their spiritual and material care” (10).⁶

Bugyis adds: “By reviewing the chronicles, saints’ lives, letters, charters, and prescriptive sources that praised, memorialized, and directed their lives, scholars have gleaned evidence of nuns founding monasteries, serving as counselors to secular and ecclesiastical officials, participating in regional synods, teaching, preaching, hearing confessions, liturgically reading the gospel, and administering the Eucharist” (11). Scholars have done this by looking at unusual primary sources, such as hagiographies. This kind of scholarship is the model for the 1000 Women in Religion WikiProject’s strategy of, as I stated in chapter one, both increasing content in general scholarship about women religious and creating and improving Wikipedia articles about them. Like scholars like Bugyis, Wikipedia editors dedicated to mitigating the gender gap and systemic bias on Wikipedia need to locate secondary odd literature-like sources, which is often just as difficult as the primary sources scholars are using to accomplish the same goals. It has been my experience that hagiographies are one of those sources, at least for the female saints I have been able to research and write about on Wikipedia.

There are three Wikipedia policies, as I have already stated, that have both helped make the site the most trustworthy source of information on the internet and have, as an unintended consequence, caused and exacerbated the gender gap and systemic bias on

Wikipedia: reliability, “no original research” (NOR), and notability. According to the reliability policy, a concept I have already introduced but will now define, “Wikipedia articles should be based on reliable, published sources, making sure that all majority and significant minority views that have appeared in those sources are covered... If no reliable sources can be found on a topic, Wikipedia should not have an article on it” (WP:Reliable). Related to the reliability policy is verifiability, which requires inline citations for all quotations and for “any material challenged or likely to be challenged” (WP:Reliable). For biographies of living persons, contentious material of any kind, whether it is negative, positive, neutral, or questionable, about living people that is poorly sourced or unsourced must be immediately removed. The No Original Research (NOR) policy states that Wikipedia articles must not contain original research. On Wikipedia, original research refers “to material—such as facts, allegations, and ideas—for which no reliable, published sources exist” (WP:No Original Research), which includes any synthesis or analysis of published material that reaches or implies a conclusion not stated by the sources. As a Wikipedia editor who contributes to articles about obscure female saints, I have found my fair share of content that I have had to either exclude or correct to ensure that these policies are followed. For example, I recently found myself having to change content from the Wikipedia biography of Edith of Wilton, a saint who lived in Kent, England, near London, during the late 10th century. The original text in the article stated that two casts of Edith’s seal matrix, or a device used for making impressions, mostly in wax, to authenticate or ensure the security of a document, have survived to the present time, but the source used to support the statement, from the British Museum database, does not mention Edith, so cannot support the claims made in the article (Seal Matrix). Consequently, I removed the content.

The statement in the section's first sentence of the older version stated that two casts of Edith's seal have survived, but the source, a blog post from the British Library, only discusses one seal, probably created during Edith's lifetime but used by her community in Wiltshire for centuries (Hudson). I removed that content as well but was able to replace it with content from Bugyis' *The Care of Nuns*. This is a good example of using the NOR and reliability policies. The editor of the older version of "Edith of Wilton" wanted to make a connection between the seals described in the British Library blog post and the ones archived at the British Museum; while it is likely both belonged to Edith, neither source explicitly makes that statement. That kind of connection-making is appropriate for essays or other kinds of academic writing, but it violated the NOR policy and does not belong on Wikipedia. The editor also violated the reliability policy by using a blog post, despite its potential usefulness in improving Edith's biography. The notability policy, which was developed in order to prevent the "indiscriminate inclusion of topics" (WP:Notability) on Wikipedia, "is a test used by editors to decide whether a given topic warrants its own article" (WP:Notability). The policy states that information on Wikipedia must be verifiable and that Wikipedia's users can check if the information presented comes from a reliable source (WP:Verifiability). If no reliable, independent sources can be found about a topic, it should not have its own separate article. Topics on Wikipedia must be notable, or "worthy of notice", and the subject of a biography on Wikipedia must "be 'worthy of notice' or 'note'—that is, 'remarkable' or 'significant, interesting, or unusual enough to deserve attention or to be recorded'" (WP:Notability (People)). People are deemed notable if "they have received significant coverage in multiple published secondary sources that are reliable, intellectually independent of each other, and independent of the subject" (WP:Notability (People)). This

policy is the most problematic when it comes to overcoming the gender gap and systemic bias on Wikipedia and has been weaponized by those seeking to limit content about women and other underrepresented groups. Additionally, as we saw in chapter one of this thesis, biographies about women and female-centric topics on Wikipedia tend to be scrutinized more. For example, sources used in biographies about women are deemed unreliable, while the same kind of source used in biographies about men are not questioned.

For example, the British Library blog post mentioned above, technically violates the policy of reliability because it is a blog post. The policy explicitly states that works written or published by the subjects themselves, which in the age of the internet includes social media posts and blog posts, do not meet the criteria of reliability. As the Wikipedia policy about verifiability, another policy that has the potential to hinder the effort of mitigating the gender gap and systemic bias, states, “Anyone can create a personal web page, self-publish a book, or claim to be an expert. That is why self-published material such as books, patents, newsletters, personal websites, open wikis, personal or group blogs..., content farms, Internet forum postings, and social media postings are largely not acceptable as sources” (WP:Verifiability). Wikipedia’s verifiability policy goes on to state, however: “Self-published expert sources may be considered reliable when produced by an established subject-matter expert...” (WP:Verifiability). For this reason, a strong case could be made that the British Library post, which was written by scholar and archivist Alison Hudson, could be used as a source in “Edith of Whilton” because Hudson is “an established subject-matter expert” (WP:Verifiability) from a prestigious institution.

For this reason, even though I initially removed it because I did not have time to incorporate its information into Edith’s article, I would recommend using it, after explaining

the reason on its talk page. I followed this policy in this way while working on articles about Maya Angelou, using her autobiographies to support the content in the articles about her, because it made sense to use her writings about her own life as authoritative, even though they were technically “self-published.” However, when other third-party sources corroborated the content in Angelou’s autobiographies, I tended to supplement the content with it, something that was challenging but not difficult. It also helped that Angelou’s autobiographies are published by Random House, a well-established publishing house. The verifiability policy also advises to exercise caution when using these sources. I recommend that other editors and contributors follow this practice when creating content from and by other memoirs and autobiographies, especially about women.

Another case study about how to leverage these policies is my experience editing articles about another of my niches on Wikipedia, the sport of figure skating. I also found, when I started editing and creating articles about figure skating in the summer of 2018, that most of the articles on Wikipedia about the sport and its athletes, both male and female, were notably brief or inadequate, especially when compared to articles about male-dominated sports such as baseball or American football. Recognizing that this was yet another instance of the gender gap and systemic bias on Wikipedia, I took it upon myself to improve as many articles about the sport of figure skating as I could before the 2022 Winter Olympics, when even the uninitiated figure skating fan is more likely to watch the sport and turn to Wikipedia to gain information about its athletes and the technical aspects of figure skating. In addition to creating, improving, and expanding over 25 articles about the technical aspects of figure skating and about half-a-dozen biographies, I also co-wrote an essay about how to write Wikipedia articles about figure skating (WP:WikiProject Figure Skating).⁷ Articles about the

technical aspects of the sport (elements such as jumps and spins) tend to be shorter and less comprehensive and not because there is a lack of information about them. Instead, figure skating, despite its early history, is a female-dominated sport, at least in the U.S., and is therefore prey to the gender gap. I believe the sources that supports the content in them can be defined as odd literature because they can be difficult to locate and are difficult to categorize.

For example, the sources required to defend the claims in articles about sports tend to be self-published (webpages, rules and regulation documents, and event reports), so citing those sources is technically against Wikipedia policies. Most editors of sports-related articles, however, use those sources because if they did not, and strictly used secondary sources, their articles would not be comprehensive. Most editors who watch sports-related articles understand this, so they do not tend to protest the practice. For example, a short Wikipedia article about the twizzle, a difficult turn in figure skating, which I largely wrote, uses almost all self-published sources.



Image 3.2. Ice dancers Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir, performing twizzles in 2011 (CC BY-SA 3.0).

Two sources in “Twizzle” are documents published by the International Skating Union (ISU), the organization that oversees figure skating and speed skating: “Technical Panel Handbook,” which is a list and description of the rules and regulations for single skating for the 2020-2021 season; "Special Regulations & Technical Rules: Single & Pair Skating and Ice Dance 2018," a document updated and published every few years that also describes the sport’s rules and regulations for all four disciplines (single skating, pair skating, ice dance, and synchronized skating); and a communication (or memo) published by the ISU in 2018. It also cites an article from *International Figure Skating*, an industry magazine. (Industry magazines are also considered self-published sources.) All these sources are both difficult to categorize and to locate, unless one knows where to look for them; in this case, from a search on the ISU webpage, a source that is not always easily accessible unless the researcher is familiar with the webpage and its search functions, a skill that requires several hours to learn.

Another article that illustrates these points is about an obscure figure in the long and interesting history of figure skating, “Robert Jones (Artilleryman).” In early February 2021, I participated in a discussion centering around the article’s possible deletion, or removal from Wikipedia. When an editor comes to the conclusion that an article is not notable enough to warrant its existence, they nominate it by adding it to a list, a process called “Articles for Deletion,” or AfD.; other editors discuss the nomination and vote to either remove or, to use the language in the policy, to “keep” it (WP:Articles for Deletion). It would be interesting to study the kinds of articles that tend to be nominated at AfD, and if articles about women and other underrepresented groups and topics tend to appear at AfD more than other kind of articles and if they end up being deleted more often, but in the meantime, I would not be

surprised if that were the case. Robert Jones, called “Captain Jones” by the royal court and popular press at the time even though he was a lieutenant in the British Army, was one of the first figure skaters in Britain, well before figure skating was formally established as a sport, and wrote the first book published about figure skating, *The Art of Figure Skating*, in 1772. One would think that those facts would be enough to support Jones’ notability, even though at the time of the AfD about his Wikipedia article, his biography was very short, just two sentences long, was labelled as a stub, had just four sources and contained another label, or tag, calling for additional research to be done. Fortunately, the consensus was to keep the article, especially after I promised to work on improving it, which I did, and after another editor added more content and five more sources. In this case, it was not that Jones was not notable, because he clearly was, but that his biography was short and underdeveloped. Additionally, there was enough sources that supported his notability, but they had not yet been located and used.



Image 3.3. Sketch of Robert Jones (Public Domain).



Image 3.4. "The Firework Macaroni" (1772), possibly a caricature of Jones. (He also wrote about and popularized the public use of fireworks.) (Public Domain)

It should be noted that not only was Jones a figure skater, but he was most likely a part of the macaroni subculture of the British royal court and that he was sentenced to death for sodomy in 1772, the same year he published *The Art of Figure Skating* but was pardoned and exiled by King George III after his trial (Hines xxx). Rictor Norton, an LGBTQ scholar who has written extensively about Georgian culture and literature in 18th-century Britain, including the gay subculture, claimed that Robert Jones had been written out of the early history of figure skating, which is not strictly true (Norton). The premiere historian about the sport of figure skating, James R. Hines, mentions Jones' landmark book in his 2011 reference *Historical Dictionary of Figure Skating*, as one would expect, but he also mentions Jones' trial, conviction, and exile in a chronology section at the beginning of the book. Jones fails, however, to warrant a separate entry in Hines' otherwise extensive dictionary. Hines extensively describes technical information from Jones' book in two other books: *Figure Skating: A History* (2006) and *Figure Skating in the Formative Years* (2015), although he does not mention Jones' conviction in either book. Figure skating is a notoriously conservative sport, despite the large number of LGBTQ figure skaters in its history, so it is easy to assume that Hines did not mention Jones' history in these books because of the homophobia, discrimination, and racism that plagues it up to this day. However, Hines gave Jones credit for describing technical aspects of the sport, for designing ice skates that were popular at the time, and for going on record supporting the participation of women in the sport, controversial during the early days of figure skating. As of this writing, I have been able to improve and expand Jones' biography; I used Norton as one of my sources, which was used as a source even before the AfD, even though his writings about Georgian life during the 18th century in Britain are technically self-published and collected on internet

webpages. There were some objections to using Norton during the AfD, but I chose to use it anyway to ensure that Jones' biography was comprehensive and because Norton, as was the case about Alison Hudson's British Library post mentioned above, could be considered an expert about Jones. At any rate, Jones' Wikipedia article is a good case study about the problems that plague neglected topics, as well as articles about women and underrepresented groups, on Wikipedia.

Knowing how to effectively use the edit histories and talk pages of biographies and articles about obscure topics is another important skill editors of these articles should learn. In his history of the encyclopedia, Robert Collison states that past editions of encyclopedias should be preserved and never superseded by more current editions. While newer editions might include more detail and more balanced information on some subjects than older editions, encyclopedias are "very much slaves of fashion" (6) and its writers and editors remove topics to make room for others. He suggests that libraries, if possible, should make the "intellectual investment" (6) of storing previous editions of encyclopedias because since the mid-18th century, most experts of their fields in the western world have contributed to encyclopedias, these volumes are a record of it, and throwing away older editions of encyclopedias would erase their contributions from the scholarly record. Collison might well have liked the solution to this dilemma provided by Wikipedia, since every contribution to every article is not only recorded in its revision history but are also easily searchable. For example, I used the revision history of the Wikipedia biography about (recently) retired figure skater and two-time U.S. Nationals champion Alysia Liu, an article I created in late July 2018, to defend some editorial choices I had made in the initial stages of its development. I also used Liu's biography's talk page.

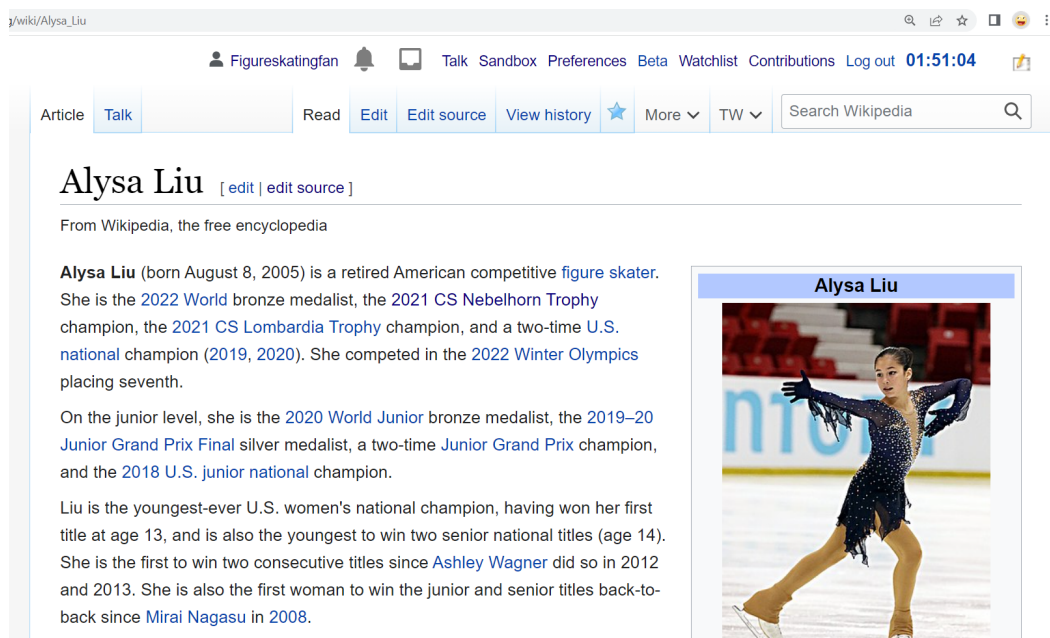


Image 3.4. Screenshot of the top of “Alysa Liu.” I have marked how to access its revision history.

Even on Wikipedia, having strong interpersonal and communication skills is important, especially when it comes to creating and improving articles about controversial and obscure figures and topics. At any rate, talk pages are the places on Wikipedia to negotiate about sources that do not strictly adhere to the community’s definitions of reliability and notability. As we have already seen, however, many editors of underrepresented groups find this kind of discussion and consensus-building emotional and gendered labor. I recognize that this is not a perfect solution and a temporary one at best because it is the kind of gendered and emotional labor, as I described in chapter one, that women are expected to perform, even on Wikipedia. I have found, however, that aligning myself with groups also dedicated to help mitigate the effects of the gender gap and systemic bias on Wikipedia helps with the weariness and frustration one invariably experiences dealing with other editors on talk pages and other spaces on Wikipedia. At any rate, talk pages are the places on Wikipedia to negotiate about sources that do not strictly adhere to the

community's definitions of reliability and notability and is not beyond the expectations of all of us who contribute to Wikipedia. I also recognize that those of us who choose to work on and contribute to articles seem to have to do it more, which for now, is unfortunate but sometimes necessary.⁸

I created Liu's article in July 2018, on the request of a fellow editor who was also a collegiate figure skater at UC Berkeley and who trained with and knew Liu. He wanted to create her article, but was worried about violating "Conflict of Interest," another important policy that prohibits editors from contributing to Wikipedia about themselves and their families, friends, employers, and other relationships (WP:Conflict of Interest), so he asked me to create and work on it. Less than three weeks later, two cleanup templates (or "tags"), which are used to draw attention to problems within articles, had been placed at the top of Liu's article, one regarding its tone and the other identifying it as having excessive detail unsuitable for a general audience. I believed that the placement of the tags was unwarranted, so I used the history of the biographies of other figure skaters to research if maintenance tags had been placed on them shortly after they had been created. I looked at Olympic gold medalist Nathan Chen's article and found that although Chen's article was briefly tagged for notability issues and removed shortly afterwards, it never was tagged for inappropriate tone or excessive detail like Liu's was. I also maintained that the best biographies about athletes, both in figure skating and in other sports, were similarly detailed. I manually removed both tags from Liu's biography, as is the practice for maintenance tags, and posted my reasons on the Liu article's talk page, stating that I suspected that the tags were placed there due to gender gap and systemic bias reasons, since I doubted that similar tags were placed in articles about male athletes and was able to demonstrate that no such tags had ever been placed on

Chen’s article. After my reasoned arguments, no maintenance tag has been placed on Liu’s biography since, even though Liu’s quick fame has garnered a great deal of attention to it (Alysa Liu, Nathan Chen).



Image 3.5. Nathan Chen at the 2017 U.S. Figure Skating Championships (CC BY-SA 4.0). (If you look closely behind and to the right of Chen, you can see me in the stands. Not only is my image immortalized in Wikipedia, but this is also another instance of me “being in the room when it happened.”)

The reliability, NOR, and notability policies, which define Wikipedia’s knowledge-making practices, preclude other ways of transmitting knowledge, such as oral traditions practiced by indigenous cultures (Vetter). As Vetter states and as we saw previously, “Wikipedia’s failure to represent and engage indigenous and/or oral knowledge practices is only one example of the systemic biases at work in the encyclopedia” (Vetter). While the Wikipedia community has taken steps to solve this problem in the past few years, Vetter does not believe that they have gone far enough. He agrees with me, however, that the contradictions inherent in Wikipedia can be reconciled by focusing on its transparent and dynamic properties, such as the talk pages of individual editors and of articles themselves, and the organizational efforts of WikiProjects such as Art+Feminism, Women in Red, and

1000 Women in Religion. Consequently, one of the ways to increase content about women and other underrepresented groups and topics on Wikipedia is for editors to gain the skills in locating those sources, incorporating them into articles, and justifying their use in the articles they write. As I stated earlier, biographies about women and female-centered topics tend to be scrutinized more, so editors who specialize in these articles, like me, need to be prepared for the additional attention by being knowledgeable about Wikipedia policies and how to use them to support the creation of and continued existence of these articles. In other words, those of us interested in mitigating the realities of the gender gap must have advanced skills in conducting research and an in-depth knowledge about Wikipedia policies. Again, this seems like additional, gendered labor, but as I said above about the use of talk pages, it is a temporary but necessary solution.

With all this discussion about researching and writing about obscure topics on Wikipedia and using its policies to mitigate the effects of the gender gap and systemic bias, it has been easy for me to forget and thus use one of the most important policies in Wikipedia, one that is just as important as the others I have discussed: “If a rule prevents you from improving or maintaining Wikipedia, ignore it” (WP:Ignore). It may be the most important policy for those of us interested in making the world a better place through Wikipedia because it gives us freedom to tell editors with other goals and to the gatekeepers of those who want to keep Wikipedia the Enlightenment, paper-bound institution it is that we require this odd literature type of source to ensure that the article in question is comprehensive and fully summarizes the scholarship out there, even if they do not strictly adhere to other policies. As I have already stated, the task of mitigating the effects of the gender gap and systemic bias may seem daunting and unsurmountable, but as one who has been actively

involved in it, it is a worthwhile and satisfying one. It is my hope that this thesis aids those working to ensure that Wikipedia fulfills its mission to include all kinds of knowledge, and to, in the words of Argentine academic and politician Diana Maffia, “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” (Maffia, qtd. in Evans et al.).

NOTES

1. Wagner and her colleagues, however, never really define “notable,” even when the term is applied to men covered by Wikipedia. This is unfortunate because by their very existence, all biographies should be notable due to Wikipedia’s requirement that all subjects of all biographies on the site are notable (“WP:Notability”), and may explain the differences in their findings and studies of most Wikipedia scholars.

2. Poe’s article in *The Atlantic* is delightful in that it takes advantage of its online appearance and uses hyperlinks to Wikipedia articles, including one about tacos.

3. Enjoyment is certainly one of my main motivations for contributing to Wikipedia. In 2014, I was interviewed by a small regional online publication, which quoted me, "If it wasn't fun, I wouldn't waste my time" (Jones).

4. It is my hope that I have worked on some of these well-written and artistic articles. Some of my favorite Wikipedia articles that can be described in this way, much of which were written by my mentors who assisted with the improvement of the article about “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,” include: “Amazing Grace,” “Museum of Bad Art” (which is an exceptional mixture of comedic and encyclopedic writing) “Cousin Bette” (and most of the articles about the novels of Balzac), “Barton Fink,” “Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell,” and “Mary Wollstonecraft.”

5. Below is a list of other hagiographies I’ve used:

- Butler, Alban and Paul Burns, eds. *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, 12 vols., A&C Black, 1995. (Very valuable source. This source is divided up monthly, following the saints’ feast days.)

- Gould, Sabine Baring. *The Lives of the Saints*, 12 vols., Oxford University Press, 1873. (I've tended to use this source less often, due to its age, but it has proven valuable at times. Plus, it's an impressive piece of work.)

- Herbermann Charles G., et al. (eds.) *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*, 17 vols., Encyclopedia Press, 1913.

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_\(1913\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)). Retrieved 10 May 2021. (The description at Wikisource, where these volumes are stored, states: "Also referred to today as the Old Catholic Encyclopedia; an English-language encyclopedia published by The Encyclopedia Press. The first volume appeared in March 1907 and it was completed in April 1914, and was designed to give "authoritative information on the entire cycle of Catholic interests, action and doctrine." This source includes short saint bios and can be useful at times.)

- Watkins, Basil. *The Book of Saints: A Comprehensive Biographical Dictionary*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.

6. Below is a list of some of the most interesting odd lit-like sources about female saints. There are more, of course, but these are the most interesting I've found thus far.

- Bush, William. *To Quell the Terror: The True Story of the Carmelite Martyrs of Compiègne*, ICS Publications, 1999. (A history of a group of French nuns who were victims of the Reign of Terror in Paris.)

- McNamara, Jo Ann, et al. (editors and translators). *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, Duke University Press, 1992. (This book includes short biographies of 18 Frankish saints of

the sixth and seventh centuries and translations of Latin works by and about them.

McNamara has written, edited, and translated several other books about women and women religious throughout several eras of history.)

- Vann, Gerald. *To Heaven with Diana!: A Study of Jordan of Saxony and Diana d'Andalò*, iUniverse, 2006. (A fascinating account, including translations of their letters, of the platonic relationship of Saint Jordan and the Blessed Diana d'Andalò.)

6. I highly recommend Lauren Groff's novel *Matrix* (2021), about Marie de France, a poet and abbess who lived during the late 12th century in England, which was inspired by *The Care of Nuns*.

7. As of this writing, I was unfortunately able to complete this project, which will take several months of concerted effort and lots of further research, especially articles about the long and interesting history of the sport.

8. See "Wikipedia:Talk Page Guidelines" for advice and tips for expected behaviors on talk page.

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