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# Editing Diversity In: Reading Diversity Discourses on Wikipedia

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*Abstract: Wikipedia has a diversity problem. The encyclopedia that 'anyone can edit' can only identify 13% of its editors as women, despite it being the seventh most visited site on the web with over 18 billion page views. Through individual grants, edit-a-thons, blog articles, and international conferences, the Wikimedia Foundation (WMF) has devoted a fair amount of time and resources to tackling this 'gender gap.' While we acknowledge the good intentions of the WMF and volunteer efforts to improve conditions for women editors on Wikipedia, we argue that borrowing from corporatized diversity initiatives more effectively supports organizational growth rather than addresses the underlying reasons behind women's low representation and participation. Informed by Sara Ahmed's critique of diversity initiatives in post-secondary institutions (2012), we discuss three themes: 1) diversity as organizational rhetoric converging business principles with the language of social justice; 2) the 'softening' of diversity through the mobilization of diversity champions; and 3) diversity work as a gendered practice involving obstacles and flows. In so doing, we wish to challenge current diversity discourses while proposing practical and political alternatives to the increasingly corporatized solution of 'just add women and stir.'*

Diversity, diversity, diversity. This buzzword has become part of the institutional clarion call for women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields and has also become a part of technology companies' organizational missions. The emphasis on diversity in STEM has emerged from the recognition that despite the institutionalization of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity policies in education and employment sectors, the demographic composition of employees and workers remains overwhelmingly white and male. Several women in STEM fields, a vocal and well-organized minority, have called for transparency and accountability by demanding that institutions release their diversity figures and make commitments to recruiting more female talent. Several prominent social media companies have followed suit, with actors like Facebook (http://newsroom.fb.com/news/2014/06/building-a-more-diverse-facebook/) , Twitter (https://blog.twitter.com/2014/building-a-twitter-we-can-be-proud-of) , Google (http://www.google.ca/diversity/at-google.html) , Yahoo

(http://yahoo.tumblr.com/post/89085398949/workforce-diversity-at-yahoo) , and **LinkedIn** (http://blog.linkedin.com/2014/06/12/linkedins-workforce-diversity/) appearing to make diversity an organizational priority. Most recently, the content-sharing platform Pinterest has announced hiring goals as part of its diversity initiative, pinning down an engineering workforce composed of 30% women and 8% underrepresented ethnic minorities. Women in prominent tech leadership positions like Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg and Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer become inspirational figures for young women in STEM, shattering the glass ceiling by leaning in (or **sleeping under their desks)** (http://www.businessinsider.com/marissa-mayer-says-she-doesnt-believe-in-burnout-2012-3) .

We know the problem is partly one of recruitment but also one of retention and promotion. The metaphor of 'leaky pipelines' is often invoked to suggest that due to personal 'choices' (like child-rearing), women tend to 'fall out' of STEM fields at faster and higher rates than their male colleagues (Herman & Webster, 2007). Meanwhile, researchers and commentators have also identified aspects of STEM culture that discourage women from entering and staying. In addition to the **'chilly climate'** (https://sun.iwu.edu/~mgardner/Articles/chillyclimate.pdf) (Wasburn & Miller, 2006) of subtle sexism that many women experience during education and employment, STEM's **competitive environments** (http://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2014/10/women-stem.aspx) , **grueling work schedules** (http://www.fastcompany.com/3037075/strong-female-lead/why-are-women-are-leaving-science-engineering-tech-jobs) , and **emphasis on after-work socializing** (https://modelviewculture.com/pieces/alcohol-and-inclusivity-planning-tech-events-with-non-alcoholic-options) can make it difficult for women to achieve that elusive work-life balance when they have family responsibilities. More pernicious accounts of this chilliness document a 'brogrammer' culture of sexual harassment, assault, discrimination, and exclusion—what many tech companies have strategically reframed as 'unconscious bias.' In response, many institutions have hosted and sponsored training seminars, professional development workshops, networking events, retreats, and keynote-led conferences for women in STEM to help challenge stereotypes and empower them to go boldly where no woman has gone before.

The uptake and promotion of diversity initiatives are found not only in workplaces and schools but online as well. The Wikimedia Foundation (herein WMF), which manages Wikipedia, has made gender diversity part of its mission since finding out the significant gendered editing disparities on the encyclopedia branded as the 'sum of all knowledge.' In response to a decline in the number of editors and concerns over the quality of contributions, the **Wikimedia Foundation**

(https://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Home) paired up with UN University to survey Wikipedians for the first time in 2008. They were surprised by what they discovered. Wikipedia—the seventh most visited website on the planet (trailing for-profit giants like Google, Facebook and Yahoo), written in 292 languages, with 18 billion page views, and nearly 500 million unique monthly visitors—could only identify 13% of its editors as women.

Since then, academics and journalists have identified other 'gender gaps' on Wikipedia, including a disparity in the number of articles written by women as well as the coverage of important women and articles presumed to be of importance to them (Lam et al. 2011; Reagle & Rhue 2011; Eckert & Stine, 2013). Of equal concern has been the encyclopedia's cultural bias, where English-language articles written by, for, and starring white western men vastly outnumber global perspectives (Livingstone 2010; Graham 2009; Cohen 2011b). Wikipedia's gender and racial politics have even been documented in this journal, with feminist academics describing 'Wikistorming' as praxis (Juhasz & Balsamo, 2012), firsthand accounts of Wikipedia's misogynistic infopolitics (Peake, 2015), and insider perspectives on the challenges and queer possibilities of the encyclopedia (Raval, 2014).

The WMF has responded to this news as most institutions do—by vowing to do better. Identifying the gender gap as 'systemic bias' that 'naturally grows from its contributors' demographic groups' and 'results in an imbalanced coverage of subjects on Wikipedia,' the WMF set out ambitious goals: increase women's participation to 25% by 2015, with the hope of achieving gender parity in the future (Cohen 2011a). The WMF has also invested significant effort into understanding why women do not contribute. Compiling responses from women across various Internet fora, former WMF Executive Director Sue Gardner listed the following **reasons** (http://suegardner.org/2011/02/19/nine-reasons-why-women-dont-edit-wikipedia-in-their-own-words/) :

an editing interface that was not user-friendly

a lack of free time and self-confidence

aversion to conflict and a distaste for participating in edit wars

the belief that their contributions would be reverted or deleted

a misogynistic and overly sexualized environment

an unwelcoming atmosphere for newcomers

The WMF has also invested significant effort into understanding why women do not contribute. In 2012, Wikipedia began rolling out its VisualEditor, a WYSIWYG extension designed to make editing more accessible for newcomers. [1] Volunteer-led task forces (i.e. **Gender Gap Task Force** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Countering_systemic_bias/Gender_gap_task_force) , **Global Perspectives Task Force)** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Countering_systemic_bias/Global_perspective) have also been actively working to identify and discuss diversity problems and solutions; meanwhile, various Wikipedians have collaborated on the **Teahouse** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Teahouse) project, a peer-based learning environment designed specifically to attract and retain women newcomers. The WMF has also supported various community-building events, with meetups, parties, and edit-a-thons as prominent examples. Notably, the WMF has also created the **Inspire campaign** (https://blog.wikimedia.org/2015/03/04/inspire-campaign-funds-gender-diversity/) , funding 16 new crowd-sourced projects designed to reduce its gender gap. Its rationale for supporting these activities is clear: more women contributors will reduce the gender bias, thus enhancing the quality of the encyclopedia.

While we acknowledge the WMF's well-intentioned efforts and the work of its volunteers, it is the wedding of institutional and political goals under the tent of diversity that is the substantive focus of this essay. We argue that the WMF's current approaches to diversity more effectively support its organizational growth rather than address the underlying reasons behind women's under-representation and modest participation. Examining its public communication through its blog postings, reports, and initiatives, we assess what the WMF is saying when it comes to diversity and women. Informed by Sara Ahmed's critique of diversity initiatives in post-secondary institutions (2012), we identify three common themes: 1) diversity as organizational rhetoric converging business principles with the language of social justice; 2) the 'softening' of diversity through the mobilization of diversity champions; and 3) diversity work as a gendered practice involving obstacles and flows. In these narratives, women perform the gendered labor of filling in Wikipedia's 'gender gaps,' ironing out its accessibility issues, and weaving together initiatives aimed to improve the quality of the encyclopedia. With our feminist critique, we wish to challenge current diversity models while proposing practical and political alternatives to the increasingly corporatized solution of 'just add women and stir' (Harding, 1986).

### On Being Included

This essay draws on Sara Ahmed's significant and timely *On Being Included* (2012). Taking a phenomenological approach to racial diversity work in post-secondary institutions in Australia and the UK, Ahmed's study draws upon interviews with diversity practitioners, documentary analysis of diversity policies, and her personal experience as a committee member on various diversity committees. Informed by feminist of color critiques of diversity in educational institutions (Mohanty 2003; Alexander 2005), *On Being Included* (hereafter referred to as *Included*) describes diversity as an institutional performance where universities operate under the premise of 'doing something' while failing to adequately address or even name the problem of racism. Although *Included* focuses specifically on race and racism in post-secondary institutions, we draw parallels with the ways in which gender and sexism are addressed on Wikipedia and believe Ahmed's analysis applies to diversity initiatives in most any organization. As a non-profit institution organized around disseminating knowledge for the public good, the WMF shares many similarities to a university that strives for progressiveness and social change—even while its efforts fail to challenge the status quo.

### Diversity as Value-Added Service

*Included* builds on the critical diversity literature that identifies the institutional push to diversity as the convergence of business principles with the language of social movements. For such institutions, diversity becomes a way of 'accruing value, [of adding] value to something' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 58). This value is undoubtedly economic, as diversity gained traction within the management literature of the 1980s (Herring, 2013). Predicting that the information economy of the 21st century would require a variety of skill sets, practitioners proposed that organizations would have to diversify their workforces' demographic composition to remain competitive. This assumption became part of the 'business case' for diversity, where heterogeneous workforces would be more productive than homogenous ones. Moreover, as a response to an ever-globalized workforce, forming diverse teams able to collaborate and capitalize on difference would help support innovation and creativity (Blackmore, 2006).

Critics have argued that this managerial rhetoric has also appropriated the language of social movements while muting their political power. Ahmed and others have pointed out that the language of diversity has emerged amidst the departure of other important concepts such as equity, social justice, and anti-racism (2012, p. 1; see also Bacchi, 2000). Ellen Berrey (2007) even argues that the soft language of diversity emerged as a

neoliberal response to reactionary backlashes against affirmative action to make it more acceptable to whites. With under-representation and invisibility framed as the causes rather than the symptoms of inequity, diversity initiatives become the solution. However, rather than address the structural and cultural barriers preventing minorities' full and equal participation in education and employment through collective action, such initiatives often focus on change at the individual level (see Kalev, Dobson & Kelly, 2006).

### Counting Diversity

Quantifying diversity by counting the number of individuals coded as 'diverse' is an important institutional practice, with the language of metrics embedded in an audit culture (Power, 1994) used to 'sell' diversity as part of an organization's branding and mission. Ahmed traces this back to the work of Jean-François Lyotard (1984), who describes how institutions of higher education have increasingly shifted to a utility model focused on saleability and efficiency rather than learning. The ongoing bureaucratization of public institutions makes it so that diversity is calculated and budgeted, with organizations using the data to set goals for growth and improvement. Borrowed from the private sector (in particular, from finance), these regulatory and accountability systems make institutions so aware of the possibility for audits that they become more concerned with achieving numbers than improving systems. Diversity documents then become technologies that work in the service of audit cultures rather than communicating some underlying philosophy. The act of counting the number of underrepresented groups becomes a form of institutional performance that expresses how 'well' or 'poorly' it is doing. Diversity numbers can also act as a catalyst for institutions to do something, even as the institution is already observed to be 'doing something' by admitting that they have not been doing 'enough.'

### Accomplishing Diversity: One Champion at a Time

Increasingly, institutions brand their diversity efforts through so-called 'diversity champions'—individuals willing and able to donate their time and commitment to ensuring the success of diversity initiatives (Ahmed, 2012, p. 131). Such champions may be featured on promotional materials and showcased at events, serving as a way for institutions to imagine themselves as already 'being diverse' (p. 153). Accordingly, their 'success' stories are branded as part of the narrative of the institution's success—of 'overcoming' the obstacles *as if they are over*. As important as it is to recognize and

celebrate the accomplishments of underrepresented groups, Ahmed cautions that these modes of inclusion are selective and conditional. As she observes,

we learn over time that the condition of [the institution's] commitment is that we would in turn speak about their commitment in positive terms; which means we do not speak about anything that exposes the conditions of their commitment. (p. 154)

In other words, champions may speak about the problem of diversity but may be reluctant to actually name the source of the problem. 'To talk about racism,' Ahmed notes, 'is thus to be heard as making rather than exposing the problem: to talk about racism is to become the problem you pose' (p. 153).

### Working Diversity

When it comes to institutions meeting their diversity goals, Ahmed observes that there must be people able and willing to work toward them (p. 120). Ahmed identifies these actors—diversity workers—as 'institutional plumbers' who 'develop an expertise in how and where things get stuck' (2012, p. 32). Such people tend to represent identities and bodies already coded as 'diverse,' who have an experiential understanding of the nature and scope of the problem. Taking on this work 'so that others not only do not have to "have it" but can actually give it up' (p. 136), diversity workers tend to take on the responsibility of administrators without having the power to bring about the kinds of changes required. Thus, it is not the labor of diversity workers that Ahmed critiques; on the contrary, Ahmed acknowledges their necessity and value. It is the uneven distribution of commitment, responsibility, and labor within the institution that is the problem—institutions that claim to value diversity when the work itself is so devalued (p. 135).

How is diversity work devalued? Ahmed (2012) suggests that this is the case by pointing out how efforts are regularly funneled into activities that divert political energy away from confronting the problem. The administrative task of writing documents becomes the focus of diversity committees, who 'end up doing the document rather than doing the doing' (p. 86). Consultation processes with those coded as 'diverse' are another example. Here, the identities and bodies of those consulted are used to lend credibility to a document, regardless of whether that document actually represents their needs and interests (p. 94). Through audit processes like 'body counts,' diversity workers are assigned the task of 'changing the perception of whiteness rather than changing the

whiteness of the organization' (p. 184). Thus, diversity workers are always working—even when the initiatives they are assigned to are not.

### Promoting Diversity Online: The Case of the Wikimedia Foundation

We use Ahmed's (2012) study of diversity work in institutions to help situate our critical feminist analysis of WMF's diversity discourses. Conducting a thematic analysis of the WMF's blog (Cain & Dillon, 2003), we selected blogs because they are important public relations tools that organizations use to support activities like disclosure, news dissemination, and event promotion. They also provide ample opportunity for them to brand themselves as sites of community, commitment, and collaboration (Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009). We can also understand blogs as part of the performance cultures Ahmed describes, and we drew inspiration from her assertion that 'if organizations are saying what they are doing, then you can show they are not doing what they are saying' (2012, p. 121).

We performed a search of the WMF's blog using the terms 'diversity' and 'women.' Our query generated 63 results as of 3 August 2015, with the blog posts containing an assortment of profiles on notable Wikipedians, descriptions of initiatives and campaigns, summaries of events, and reports. We read through the content together, discussed our observations, and selected the most prominent themes for analysis. Our analysis is qualitative and our goal was neither to provide a systematic review nor a comprehensive account of all of the WMF's diversity initiatives. For the scope of this article, we deliberately limited our analysis to women and diversity, recognizing and recommending that future work explore how the WMF and other tech organizations define diversity with respect to the intersections of race/ethnicity, sexuality, class, disability, and nationality. We organized our findings into three themes: 1) diversity as converging business principles with the language of social justice; 2) diversity discourses as mobilizing the work of diversity champions as a sign of its success; and 3) diversity work as a gendered practice involving obstacles and flows.

### Diversity: Business Meets Politics

The discourse of organizations regularly blends the language of business and social justice to position themselves as bodies set out to 'do good' while 'doing well' (see Banet-Weiser, 2012). We observed how often the WMF used the language of *missions* and *movements* in its public communication. In their Mission Statement (https://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Mission_statement) , the WMF aims to 'empower and engage

people around the world to collect and develop educational content under a free license or in the public domain, and to disseminate it effectively and globally.' It defines its Wikimedia Movement as comprised of 'people and groups of people sharing common goals and activities with regard to creating and supporting free knowledge educative content.'

WMF's use of diversity initiatives to support organizational growth was clear upon closer inspection. In one post, the Foundation explains that 'addressing Wikipedia's gender gap is, at its core, about widening representation and incorporating more perspectives into the sum of human knowledge' (Bouterse, 2012). Although we do not deny that broadening Wikipedia's scope of representation and knowledge is important, it is clear that diversity is also about advancing organizational performance. In a call for women interns, another post states: 'diversity is good for creativity and sustainability, which are primary goals of any free software community' (Gil, 2013a). By framing diversity as a means to an end, the WMF attempts to use diversity to help the institution grow rather than grow the institution to accommodate diverse perspectives.

It also became apparent to us that WMF's model of diversity was a branded one that assumed any category of difference (i.e. gender, race/ethnicity, geography) could be accommodated in the same way. After the WMF's first diversity conference in Berlin in 2012, former Director of Community Resources Siko Bouterse (2013) described how groups discussed

the need, challenges and solutions for bringing more diversity – in terms of gender, geography, and beyond—to our community and to our content, in order to fulfill our vision of sharing the sum of all human knowledge with the world.

This happy model of multiculturalism is illustrated in the blog post '**Meet Some of the Women Who Edit Wikipedia** (http://blog.wikimedia.org/2015/03/06/meet-some-women-who-contribute-to-wikipedia/) ' (Sherman et al., 2015). Featuring a Russian biology student, an Indian math teacher and a Swiss community leader, this profile of 11 women was reminiscent of a 'Thai food stall model' of diversity that is celebratory, consumable, and branded (Ahmed, 2012, p. 61).

### Softening Diversity: Diversity Champions

As expected, the diversity champions profiled in our sample were all women. Most of those featured were white women from the US or women from nations such as Egypt,

Mexico, or Serbia. Images of women are used to help 'soften' the institution's image by exuding a friendly and non-threatening version of femininity. One post describing the redesign of the Wikipedia Teahouse (a site 'full of gentle colors and images of people and nature'), explains that many elements were kept intact to maintain the 'emotional connection users have with these pages on Wikipedia' (Bouterse, 2012). The Teahouse becomes a 'softer entry point to Wikipedia, where you can see there are other humans, and they're the ones talking to you' (Bouterse, 2012). Gendered notions of patience, support and gratitude give the space a 'sort of zen feeling', where hosts 'give patient and supportive answers to all kinds of questions' to the 'guests' described as 'thankful.'

Notably, discussion of Wikipedia's diversity champions tended to evade mention of 'contentious' terms like feminism or sexism in favor of more neutral, 'friendly' language. In a post describing an Egyptian edit-a-thon, one woman participant acknowledged the need for women's history to be included on the site—even as she expressed reluctance to deal with it from a 'feminist perspective' (El-Sharbaty, 2014).[2] In a profile discussing prominent Wikipedian Emily Temple-Wood, the absence of pages about prominent women scientists are framed as inspiration for her co-founding the WikiProject Women Scientists (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Women_scientists) page while the reasons behind their exclusion go unmentioned (Chang, 2013). Instead, WMF's diversity champions speak a branded language—using the 'soft language' of diversity by referring to the underrepresentation of women as a 'gender gap' and justifying diversity efforts as a way to help ensure Wikipedia's value as the 'sum of all knowledge.' Although Ahmed reminds us that those who speak the language of the institution may be doing so strategically, she also notes that it 'displays a form of practical knowledge of the difficulty of getting through' (2012, p. 175). In other words, adopting a more 'friendly' tone may help in the short-term even as it means that the structural cause of the problem—in this case, sexism—goes under-acknowledged.

#### Obstacles and Flows: The Gendering of Diversity Work

We also observed that diversity work took on a gendered dimension that depended on whether it was unpaid or paid. Given that Wikipedia primarily relies on unpaid, voluntary labor from men and women, one could argue that this practice is gender-neutral. What is striking about the unpaid work of 'doing diversity' on Wikipedia is the additional emotional labor (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotional_labor) required (cf. Hochschild, 1983). By this, we not only mean the avoidance work women editors must perform to deal with individual experiences of sexist harassment and trolling (see

Menking, 2015a; Menking & Erickson, 2015)—but also the efforts volunteers must invest when dealing with opposition to their initiatives.

In Ahmed's account, the experience of 'encountering resistance and countering that resistance' (2012, p. 175) inevitably follows efforts to alter the conditions of an existence.' In WMF reports from FemWiki organizers in Serbia and Editatona organizers in Mexico, both reported experiencing backlash from men (described as 'negative attitudes') on and off-wiki accusing them of being exclusionary (Alcázar & Martìnez, 2015; Pavlovich, 2015). Meanwhile, in a post documenting the successes and lessons learned from the first round of Inspire campaign proposals, participant feedback suggested that the mere discussion of diversity efforts generated 'nasty' and 'hostile' opposition online. As one participant noted, 'the amount of anti-woman sentiment was very distressing – ironically the degree of over-the-top anti-woman commentary was probably sufficient to justify the campaign by itself' (Morgan, 2015). Although organizers' efforts were certainly not impeded by this resistance, we also see the time and energy required to justify the work of diversity as part of its 'hidden costs.'

In our sample, women's paid work was framed differently. Those who embody diversity on a paid basis do something else—they enhance Wikipedia's infrastructure and make it flow. In a post describing the women interns recruited through the WMF's Outreach Program for Women (OPW) (Gil, 2013b), we see their 'success stories' used as 'evidence' for the initiative's 'success.' Embodying the normalization of women workers' flexibility and their precarity in the information economy (Gregg, 2008), the women interns seemed to be performing digital 'housekeeping duties' that included enhancing user experience, project management, documentation, 'polishing' MediaWiki extensions, development, and checking for bugs. Although we acknowledge that men also perform this labor, we found it interesting that this kind of work—short-term service work—was used as an example of 'diversity' *working*. [3]

### When Diversity Fails: A Look at Alternatives

But how well have the WMF's efforts to remedy its gender gap worked? According to Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales, they have **'completely failed'** (http://www.bbc.com/news/business-28701772) —at least in terms of reaching their institutional goal of increasing the number of women editors to 25% by 2015. Although his statement that the WMF will 'double down' on efforts through more outreach and software changes sounds promising, we also believe that organizations committed to diversity

should re-evaluate some of the taken-for-granted assumptions about what works when past efforts have not.

A look at the organizational literature may be instructive. In their study of diversity efforts in workplaces, researchers Alexandra Kalev, Frank Dobbin, and Erin Kelly (2006) found that programs designed to enhance organizational responsibility for diversity were more effective than **training programs designed to reduce bias** (http://theconversation.com/tech-companies-spend-big-money-on-bias-training-but-it-hasnt-improved-diversity-numbers-44411) or networking/mentorship initiatives designed to reduce isolation among women and minorities alone. These programs included the development of affirmative action plans, the hiring of diversity staff, and the formation of diversity task forces. As it currently stands, the WMF appears to invest more time and resources into the latter—with most of the projects funded by the 2015 Inspire campaign focused on event-based efforts to 'fill' the content/gender gap on Wikipedia (Bouterse & Wang, 2015). And, although volunteers from the Wikipedia community have formed their own diversity task forces, we believe that organizations claiming to value diversity should also hire individuals who have both the power and the responsibility to ensure that these initiatives succeed. [4] Crowd-sourced initiatives like the Inspire campaign may be helpful in recruiting new individuals and eliciting new ideas, but the administrative costs of writing, reviewing, and adjudicating grant proposals can also divert time and energy away from confronting the problem.

It has also been suggested that the emphasis on recruitment as a solution to the diversity problem may ignore other important measures such as retention and promotion (Tapia & Kvasny, 2004; Thomas, 2012). Focusing on the retention rates associated with Wikipedia edit-a-thons, for example, would be rather revealing. A 2015 **evaluation** (https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Grants:Evaluation/Evaluation_reports/2015/Editathons) of editor recruitment and retention in 80 edit-a-thons found that while 52% of 354 newcomers made at least one edit one month after their event, only 15% of them reported doing so at the six-month mark. Retention rates for existing editors, however, were significantly higher at 70%. This suggests that although edit-a-thons serve as important community spaces, women editors at different stages may have different concerns.

Wikipedia's hostility toward newcomers is one barrier. Given that editors who identify as women online are more likely to have their contributions reverted during their first few edits (Lam et al., 2011), entries created during Wikipedia edit-a-thons can easily

become targets for deletion (see Boboltz, 2015; Giamio, 2016). Although this may be partly due to the fact that one-time events make it challenging to familiarize new participants with the seemingly endless rules and norms of editing Wikipedia (Menking, 2015b), it is equally true that there is a culture of gate-keeping inhabited by overzealous and highly-skilled page-patrollers who leverage these rules to scrutinize new pages—particularly those related to topics concerning women (Peacock, 2015). If the WMF is interested in not only recruiting but retaining new editors from underrepresented groups, then examining how these rules and norms may systematically exclude their knowledge and participation (see Raval, 2014) may be fruitful in developing more effective recruitment efforts. [5]

For more experienced women contributors, the challenges they face run deeper and the solutions are more complex. Reports of sexist harassment, trolling, and threats (Boboltz, 2015; Erhardt, 2016) mean that many women on Wikipedia often encounter a hostile climate, where they respond by either disguising their gender, avoiding editing on 'contentious' issues (i.e. feminism), taking breaks, or leaving altogether.This has led a number of them to conclude that the WMF has not done enough to deal with the problem of online sexism (Menking, 2015b, Williams, 2015). Although the creation of **codes of conduct** (https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Grants:IdeaLab/Code_of_conduct_synchronization) for online communities is a step in the right direction, paying attention to the composition and dynamics of groups assigned the task of settling user disputes is also important.

Wikipedia's Arbitration Committee (ArbCom) is one notable example. A series of well-publicized cases—ranging from the December 2014 **banning** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Arbitration/Requests/Case/Interactions_at_GGTF#Final_decision) of a number of **feminist editors** (http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/bitwise/2014/12/wikipedia_editing_disputes_the_crowdsourced_encyclopedia_has_ who belonged to the Gender Gap Task Force, the January 2015 Gamergate controversy **ruling** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Arbitration/Requests/Case/GamerGate) that resulted in gender-related topic bans that included **editors** (http://www.markbernstein.org/Jan15/Infamous.html) trying to stop sexist edits to the page, and the July 2015 **site banning** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Arbitration/Requests/Case/Lightbreather) of a feminist editor who had **unsuccessfully** (http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/10/how-wikipedia-is-hostile-to-women/411619/) tried to launch a case against an editor who had been impersonating her on a pornographic website—suggests that more gender-sensitive processes are required. Although these cases are complex and many of the sanctioned

users had not behaved perfectly, the standards of conduct appeared to be set higher for editors actively trying to resist sexism on Wikipedia.

This suggests two things: First, that committees mainly composed of white male editors may not always rule fairly when it comes to women who break the rules of 'civility'; and second, that Wikipedia's emphasis on transparency can make ArbCom decision-making susceptible to outside pressure from other editors. [6] Although it could be argued that Wikipedia's consensus decision-making style means that the WMF should not intervene in its rules and structures, the WMF cannot have it both ways. At some point the WMF may wish to consider editing its hands-off approach if it is serious about increasing its pool of women editors—particularly when Wikipedia processes result in the banning of women and pro-feminist editors who have both the knowledge and technical expertise to contribute and encourage others to do so.

#### Conclusion

In this essay, we have argued that the WMF's model of diversity more effectively serves organizational goals rather than addressing the causes behind women's low participation and representation on Wikipedia. Sara Ahmed's (2012) critique of diversity initiatives in post-secondary institutions has been instructive here, as it challenges the assumption that the lack of racial diversity in an institution can necessarily be corrected without addressing structural issues like racism. Our look at the WMF's public communication suggests that a similar phenomenon is occurring when it comes to diversity and women. Blending the language of business and social justice, the WMF brands its diversity efforts as part of ensuring that Wikipedia becomes the 'sum of all knowledge.' Using the branded language of gender gaps and mobilizing diversity champions, the WMF engages in a 'happy talk' of diversity (Ahmed, 2012) that fails to engage the problem of sexism beyond the levels of 'unconscious' and 'systematic' bias. This strategy has consequences for those who do the actual work of diversity. On Wikipedia, women editors and event organizers not only have to perform additional **affective labor** (http://socialtextjournal.org/affective-labor-of-wikipedia-gamergate/) as they encounter harassment and trolling, but they also must spend time justifying why their efforts are necessary in the first place. In short, women are doing the work of 'editing diversity in' while the structural sexism embedded into the norms and practices of Wikipedia remains the same.

Since we began studying the WMF's public communication, however, there has been a noticeable shift in how the organization discusses the conditions of women editors on

the site. Increased media attention to sexual harassment and other forms of online violence against women and other minorities (i.e. stalking, doxxing, swatting) has made it impossible for the WMF to overlook the problem of misogyny. In fall 2015, the Safety and Support team (formerly the Community Advocacy Team) released a **report** (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/52/Harassment_Survey_2015_-_Results_Report.pdf) from a survey of editors to determine the prevalence and problem of online harassment while it has created an online harassment consultation for editors to give feedback on possible solutions (Earley & Dennis, 2015). Although funded projects from the 2015 round of the Inspire Campaign did not address the problem of online harassment explicitly (with the exception of the Ada Initiative's **Gender-gap admin training** (https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Grants:PEG/Ada_Initiative/Gender-gap_admin_training) ), we anticipate that the relevance of the topic will mean that some efforts and energies will be invested in its direction.

Yet, much like with diversity efforts, the question that remains will be how the source of the problem and the solutions are defined. If the WMF defines harassment as a behavioral issue and proposes individual-level changes such as software improvements and administrator training while Wikipedia's structures and norms remain unchallenged, then efforts to adequately deal with the sexism women editors experience online will only produce limited effects. But if the WMF is willing to take seriously the feminist argument that the problem is partly rooted in the ways in which women's experiences and ways of knowing are devalued in a patriarchal society—not only through 'negative attitudes' but also through the androcentric bias of Wikipedia itself (Reagle, 2013)—then perhaps more long-term and sustainable changes are possible.

For feminists, this requires us to ask more from diversity initiatives and the organizations that ask us to lend our skills, time, and knowledge toward ensuring their success. Consider the ways in which edit-a-thons ask women and feminists to contribute content that suits Wikipedia's demands for notability. On one hand, this gives us an opportunity to intervene in knowledge production by including the achievements of women who have been written out of digital history. But as one WMF blog commenter **noted** (http://blog.wikimedia.org/2012/11/26/fem-tech-edit-a-thon-sparks-discussions-about-wikipedia-gender-gap/#comment-9428) , this also asks us to participate in the masculinist project of privileging individuals who have 'succeeded' according to standards dictated and enforced by men—something fundamentally at odds with feminism's emphasis on the lives of marginal women (see also Mattern, 2015; Wernimont, 2013). How do we go

about ensuring that our effects challenge and transform existing structures while still maintaining a presence?

We must also consider what it means to encourage a constituency that has historically performed the bulk of unpaid labor to donate more time toward ensuring their visibility and representation on Wikipedia (Wadewitz, 2012, 2013). And, given that the availability of time and access to resources required to participate on Wikipedia is unevenly distributed across race, class, disability, and nationality, we must be mindful that our contributions do not solely reflect the interests and experiences of privileged women. At the same time, if we consider Wikipedia to be a valuable free resource and contributing to it as a critical feminist intervention, then this unpaid labor of activism may be worth doing for those who can (Wadewitz, 2012).

These are difficult questions, and we acknowledge that these problems precede and go beyond the purview of the WMF and Wikipedia. There is no 'best practice' or 'quick fix' (Kalev et al., 2006) for problems rooted in the history, culture, politics, and design of online and offline spaces centered around white, western, male values. We require solutions that are iterative, reflexive, critical, and collective. Although our demands for cultural and structural change may go beyond the immediate capacity of institutions and organizations, asking these difficult questions is exactly how we enhance feminist praxis moving forward. Rather than encourage us to abandon diversity efforts altogether, critique shows us the disparity between what institutions or organizations are saying and doing so that we may better understand what we are saying and doing as well (Ahmed, 2012). Which perspectives and voices get represented, and which remain excluded? How do we intervene in technology in ways that change its structure and form? While STEM institutions and organizations may attempt to 'edit women in,' there is little stopping us from holding them accountable as we make our own changes along the way.

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**Footnotes**

[1] WYSIWYG is an acronym for what you see is what you get.

[2] In the Wikiwomen competition among the Egyptian students—designed to attract more women editors and enhance coverage of women's issues—men placed first and second, while women placed third and fourth. Notably, the men had already been volunteering as Wikipedia ambassadors while the women were newcomers (El-Sharbaty, 2014).

[3] And yet, even when the OPW was mentioned as an example of diversity 'working,' of 'playing an important role in bridging the gender gap in our technical community,' only 1 of the 32 students mentored was a woman—and that she 'didn't stick around' (Gil, 2013b).

[4] Notably, Kalev et al. (2006) also discovered that the modest effects produced by diversity training or networking/mentorship were enhanced when paired with organizational responsibility.

[5] Although Halfaker et al's (2012) research has suggested that use of bots and the 'calcification of rules' have acted as a deterrent to newcomers more broadly, it would be worthwhile to measure empirically how this applies to new women editors' practices.

[6] Although Halfaker et al's (2012) research has suggested that use of bots and the calcification of rules has acted as a deterrent to newcomers more broadly, it would be worthwhile to measure empirically how this applies to new women editors' practices.

[7] See transcript of the Q&A session with legal scholar Danielle Citron at WikiConference USA, October 11 2015, Washington DC.

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DIVERSITY FEMINISM PEER REVIEWED SARA AHMED SEXISM WIKIPEDIA

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## 3 THOUGHTS ON "EDITING DIVERSITY IN: READING DIVERSITY DISCOURSES ON WIKIPEDIA"

**Chupacabra**
**JUNE 1, 2016 AT 6:28 AM**

> As everyone here has already lamented, the state of diversity in the publishing industry—both across writers and editors—is bleak. It's almost as if we're starting well below zero.

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