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# WP:THREATENING2MEN: Misogynist Infopolitics and the Hegemony of the Asshole Consensus on English Wikipedia

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*When schools discourage reporting, they collude with many societal forces to cover up sexual violence. Sexual violence thrives on secrecy.*

– Jennifer Freyd, *'Official Campus Statistics for Sexual Violence Mislead'*

(<http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/7/college-campus-sexualassaultsafetydatawhitehousegender.html>)

Spring 2014 was a long season, marked by a campus-wide anti-rape movement that took off at the University of Oregon (UO). In the wake of a high profile case, administrators callously and robotically rehearsed the “one time is too many” catch phrase that, through its rhetorical singularity, renders campus sexual violence an “isolated issue.” Arguments that UO was somehow unique or unusual in its unsafe environment and unethical public relations approach to public safety became rampant in public forums and the comment sections of online articles.

The idea of writing campus sexual violence into Wikipedia was born of these circumstances, growing out of a conversation with campus activists about universities’ efforts to keep campus sexual violence invisible. By increasing the amount of freely available information on the long history of campus sexual violence across the United States, we could provide information for people looking to learn about the ways Oregon was not isolated or unique, but part of a network – and structure – of gendered violence in U.S. colleges and universities.

I spent approximately five hours creating the Wikipedia category **Schools Announced Under Investigation for Sexual Violence Policy Violations**, which included a short introduction and inter-Wikipedia links to all 72 colleges and universities that the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) announced were “under investigation” for **Title IX** (<http://www.titleix.info/Default.aspx>) and **Clery Act** (<http://clerycenter.org/summary-jeanne-clery-act>) violations. A “category” on Wikipedia functions as an indexing tool that enables people interested in, say, campus sexual violence, to see all of the schools that were part of the OCR announcement, and to read about the particular circumstances that resulted in the investigation as it related to other investigated schools. Alongside this category, then, I devoted approximately 15 hours researching specific circumstances and writing information about campus sexual violence into college and university Wikipedia pages,

drawing on sources ranging from national newspapers to student publications documenting campus sexual violence on the 72 campuses under investigation by the OCR. This occurred over the course of one week.

Within 12 hours of finishing this massive project, my twenty hours of labor was completely undone by what at first appeared to be a discrete number of Wikipedians. Information about campus sexual violence was removed from college and university pages because it was not “defining” of the institution ( **WP:UNDUE** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral\\_point\\_of\\_view#Due\\_and\\_undue\\_weight](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view#Due_and_undue_weight)) ), or appeared from an “unreliable” source (**WP:RELIABLE** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Identifying\\_reliable\\_sources](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Identifying_reliable_sources)) ), or because the events were too recent to be understood as historically relevant to institutions (**WP:RECENTISM** (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Recentism>) ), or because they were written in a “biased” tone (**WP:POV** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral\\_point\\_of\\_view](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view)) ). In addition, the category I created — an index of schools announced under investigation by the Department of Education as part of a precedent-setting move towards transparency — was nominated for deletion (consensus driven) and speedy deletion (administratively executed in cases of defamatory content). Citing the range of editorial “reverts” on content referencing campus sexual violence, this group of Wikipedians successfully deleted content about campus sexual violence through what I hereafter refer to as WP:THREATENING2MEN and the hegemony of the asshole consensus.

In this essay, I use my experience of writing campus sexual violence into Wikipedia to shine a light on a larger issue in misogynist infopolitics on the so-called “encyclopedia anyone can edit.” By misogynist infopolitics, I refer to the ways in which “factual information” is defined and consequently produced through struggles concentrated around defining, preserving, and protecting a form of masculinity – male privilege and misogyny – that is always already defined in counterpoint – if not outright hostility – to a concept of femininity-as-inferior. On Wikipedia, a misogynist infopolitics dictates that “factual information” is information pertaining to, but not threatening of, a sense of masculinity that is situated in a social world that extends beyond the confines of Wikipedia. This sense of masculinity, and its concomitant misogyny, can be enacted and protected by both men and women (Brown, 2013; Cepeda, 2014; Marcotte, 2014). Thus, rather than “ontologize” gender in criticizing Wikipedia’s gendered hostilities, or focus on the positivistic “how many women equals equality” question that defines Wikipedia’s “Gender Gap” civilizing mission, my focus in this article is on how misogynist infopolitics define Wikipedians’ interactive habits, shaping the social

environment in ways that make Wikipedians of many genders and sexualities hostile to information that challenges forms of male privilege understood to be diminishing or endangered by institutional diversity initiatives.

Here, I create an important distinction between male privilege and misogyny. Where male privilege might be understood as a form of power granted to individuals based on assertions or assumptions about their gender, misogyny is the use of that power in acts of domination. While this ethnography analyzes misogynist infopolitics and the normalization of hostility in online “cultures” like Wikipedia, it also explores the boundaries and limitations of male privilege held by feminists and their allies – most notably, my own. As a cis-gendered white man writing content into Wikipedia to raise awareness about the violent sexual practices of men at American universities I naively assumed that I could assert my male privilege through “Wikilawyering” to even the playing field of what would be counted as “information.” Through social interactions with other Wikipedians invested in the use of misogynist tactics to protect their sense of male privilege, I quickly learned that the translation of male privilege into a weapon against misogyny was (and continues to be) a foolish idea. Nonetheless, the experience of doing so is fruitful for understanding the gendered social environment left otherwise illegible to Wikipedians and outsiders alike.

Broadly speaking, Wikipedia functions through four primary zones of interaction: articles (Figure 1), change logs (history) (Figure 2), talk pages (Figure 3), and administrative boards. The article is the face of a Wikipedia entry, made up of a lead that outlines the defining characteristics of the subject of the article and its subsequent sections. These articles are primarily written by an all-volunteer digital labor force popularly identified as Wikipedians. Wikipedians author and edit entries based on a score of policies designated by WP:<POLICY> (for Wikipedia).<sup>[1]</sup> Wikipedians’ edits – edits broadly referring to changes to any content on Wikipedia – are automatically documented in the history, and are accompanied by self-reported “edit summaries.” These summaries indicate why an edit was made, typically with reference to a Wikipedia policy, writing practice (e.g., edited for tone), or minor edit (e.g., spelling correction). In instances where contentious edits occur, or where major changes are needed, Wikipedians use the talk page to communicate with other Wikipedians who are watching – closely following the revisions of a particular article. Talk pages are dedicated to the betterment of an article, and are a primary zone for the exercise of debates about entries. When those debates become contentious, or an editor becomes hostile, conversations are moved to Administrative Boards like “Articles for Deletion

(AfD),” “Categories for Discussion/Deletion (XfD),” and “Administrators’ Noticeboard/Incidents (ANI).” These pages are run by Wikipedia super-editors who are nominated by other experienced Wikipedians. “Admins” are granted the authority to make binding decisions on content inclusion or exclusion, and/or discipline Wikipedia editors engaged in “disruptive” behavior. Like the talk pages, consensus (defined through a majoritarian politics) and WP:<POLICY> reign supreme in these spaces. This notion of consensus has led quantitative scholars like Iosub et al. (2014) to argue that, when dealing with contentious debates, Wikipedians calmly and practically “rule with reason” through Wikipedia’s various policies on what constitutes appropriate content for an encyclopedia.

Against the grain of this belief in consensus, this essay examines the hostile environment that becomes normalized through seemingly reasonable “Wiki Policies,” an environment that has resulted in assertions that Wikipedia must be protected from “a gender war” that introduces “biased ideology” about campus sexual violence into the otherwise “factual information” about U.S. colleges and universities.<sup>[2]</sup> This ethnography is not without its quantitative supporters: Kriplean and Beschastnikh for instance, have argued that WP:<POLICIES> are most prevalent in sites of heavy ideological conflict, while a joint **University of Washington and HP Labs** (<http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?doid=1316624.1316648>) project has examined the hierarchy of policies mobilized in rhetorical “power plays” to remove or advocate for information inclusion. Through an ethnographic approach, however, I am able to go one step further than these quantitative studies to demonstrate how Wikipedians’ “power plays,” and the scientism mobilized to rationalize them as upholding “truth,” are bound up in misogynist defenses of male privilege on Wikipedia.<sup>[3]</sup>

I am particularly interested in the ways that “ruling with reason” via WP:<POLICY> facilitates Wikipedians’ misogynist attempts to maintain male privilege in the face of various Wikimedia Foundation initiatives to increase Wikipedia’s diversity both in terms of content and users. For simplicity’s sake, I codify “ruling with reason” as expertise, drawing on a long history of science and technology scholarship to do so.<sup>[4]</sup> Debates on talk pages and administrator boards, alongside those left in edit summaries, are often not about the validity of information itself, but the metapragmatic dimensions of its inclusion as determined by Wikipedians with expertise. In the case of campus sexual violence, facts came under question not through debates about statistics and occurrences of sexual violence, but rather through debates about the value of including this “type” of content on Wikipedia as per WP:<POLICY>. In many instances, I was

accused of bringing a “feminist bias” into an “otherwise neutral” or “objective” encyclopedic project – a process that I outline below. This bias, according to many Wikipedians, compromised the supposed expertise of Wikipedians, and the value of the encyclopedia, in the eyes of an undefined evaluator with a god’s eye perspective.

The expertise of Wikipedians on all things Wikipedia, according to Wikipedians’ actions, trumped any other form of expertise in knowledge production – such that knowledge about (and research on) campus sexual violence and its effects was never the real subject of debate. Instead, where Wikipedians are unable to compete on the terrain of facts and content expertise, they turn to hermeneutic arguments through a near infinite, always self referencing, system of WP:<POLICY>. To paraphrase Latour, these lawyeristic maneuvers are the most effective weapons for individuals who do not know very much about facts, as they allow Wikipedia editors to replace expertise about subject matter with expertise about Wikipedia’s rules. The image of Wikipedia I describe here, through empirical grounding in my work writing campus sexual violence into Wikipedia, is a space where the primary focus is on the mastery of policy as a tool for domination – and not on the production of, or debates about, verifiable facts and actually existing knowledge.

The gendered dimensions of Wikipedians’ lawyeristic tendencies became particularly legible in my work of writing campus sexual violence into Wikipedia. In the tradition of phenomenologically-oriented sociology and anthropology (Schutz, 1967; Bourdieu, 1977), I use my own body in, and experiences with, the process of writing campus sexual violence into Wikipedia as the site for analyses of misogyny and online knowledge culture. This site is nested in privilege: my social position as a white man has protected me from not only real-life sexual violence, but also the horrific symbolic violence against women in the midst of uninformed debates about campus sexual violence. As activist ethnographers have long argued, the site of confrontation constitutes the richest site for producing ethnographic understandings of domination in practice (Juris, 2007; Anglin et al., 2013; Scheper-Hughes, 2009). In this instance, the site is one where I “betrayed” my gender to confront the misogynist infopolitics of Wikipedians protecting me from feminist bias, as Wikipedians argued (assuming that I was a woman because of the subject I was working on). This essay, then, is a counter hegemonic attempt to reveal the machinations of privilege, misogynist infopolitics, and the hegemony of the asshole consensus on Wikipedia.

Hegemony, as Antonio Gramsci describes it in the *Prison Notebooks*, is a concept that involves a wearing down of the opposition to the point of political resignation. This paper is organized into four sections that illustrate hegemony at work on Wikipedia. In the first section, I discuss how Wikipedians' expertise is characterized by scientific discourses and lawyeristic maneuvers that dismiss "gendered" (e.g. feminized) information about campus sexual violence as "feminist, biased" and unfit for inclusion on Wikipedia. Documenting the ways in which these maneuvers around expertise are intended to maintain forms of male privilege endangered by "diverse" information, the second section of this paper demonstrates how all policies seemingly lead to one conclusion: WP:THREATENING2MEN. In the third section, I demonstrate how some Wikipedians defer to WP:<POLICY> (e.g. WP:THREATENING2MEN) to produce the "hegemony of the asshole consensus." I conclude with a suggestion for transforming Wikipedia into a space of knowledge production (not policing) that might help end this hegemony.

## Gender and Wikipedian Expertise

Nothing makes Wikipedians more angry than a discussion of gender and feminism on Wikipedia. According to a BBC report on sexism and the Wikimedia Foundation demographics survey, "The proportion of editors identifying as female hovers between 8% and 15%" (Miller, 2014). Various stakeholders in Wikipedia fear that this gap has resulted in an online encyclopedia skewed toward a masculine bias, which has gradually become the basis (or zero-degree) from which all "legitimate" knowledge must be produced. As Adrienne Wadewitz has written, "A lack of diversity amongst editors means that, for example, topics typically associated with femininity are typically underrepresented and often actively deleted" (Wadewitz, 2013). A recent international study of the gender demographics of Wikipedia articles about artists demonstrates this point, with women artists making up only 24% of all artists represented globally (Jane023, 2014).

In response to persistent problems around gender, the Wikimedia Foundation (the not-for-profit organization that manages Wikipedia) has attempted to address what they describe as a Gender Gap through both research and policy. This included establishing the Gender Gap Task Force, a mailing list for women and feminist Wikipedians, and a manifesto for change, each of which was overseen by Sue Gardner, a previous Executive Director of the Wikimedia Foundation. Her motivation, she wrote, was that Wikipedia needed to **"help men understand the obstacles women face [as editors] and**

**help them become better feminists.**” Filling the gender gap and making Wikipedian men feminists, she argued, would improve the overall quality of Wikipedia as an encyclopedia and a community.

The outrage that followed Gardner’s statement was not all that unpredictable. Critics argued that Sue Gardner was trying to “force content” into Wikipedia that “has a bias” by virtue of being “politically, not knowledge motivated.” Critics posted statements like **“Is Sue Gardner an Idiot”** on Wikipedia Review (Ottava, 2012). “Accusing Wikipedia culture of being ‘trollish and misogynistic’ is nothing less than a way to silence people who challenge mainstream feminism,” one anonymous commenter wrote in response to another anonymous post declaring that “sexism = anything that challenges the misandry inherent in feminist discourse.” (Motherboard, 2014) <sup>[5]</sup> “Closing the gender gap on Wikipedia” gave form to a wider crisis of masculinity taking shape across sites of knowledge production, one predicated on the decline of white male privilege through “diversity initiatives.”

Where internet and forum comments respond to Gardner’s assertions with emotional forms of outrage, protesting imbalanced forms of political power allotted to women and “political correctness,” Wikipedians responded “rationally” through the Byzantine system of Wikipedia policies targeted at the alleged emotionalism and bias of Gardner’s “gender war.” This maneuver is important: while one commenter suggested that addressing the gender gap on Wikipedia was “politically, not knowledge motivated,” the debate that ensued among Wikipedians was also not motivated by knowledge in terms of information. Instead, the debate focused on adherence to Wikipedia’s various rules about what counts as knowledge according to those who control the rules’ use and circulation. Wikipedians’ focus, in other words, was on control via “ruling with reason,” not the validity of the information itself.

Wikipedians’ mastery of policy as a responsive tool is what constitutes what I call Wikipedian expertise, as it marks out a space of specialization for Wikipedians and, importantly, a space that transcends “subject matter” expertise. Expertise, as I use it here, does not diverge from the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition: “an authority by reason of special skill, training or knowledge.” Where I do diverge is in my cultural evaluation of the concept of expertise and its deployment. Anthropologists of science and technology have described how “the enactment of expertise not only determines the value of cultural objects... it also confers value on those who interact with these objects” (Carr, 2010:39). For Wikipedians, the authority granted by agreement based on

Wikipedian expertise is constituted by an aggressive dismissal of expert knowledge as biased using WP:<POLICIES>, and a replacement of expert knowledge with mastery over Wikipedia's various policies for designating "legitimate" information.<sup>[6]</sup>

Wikipedian expertise, in other words, functions in contrast to subject matter expertise in other domains. It is metapragmatic: focused on speech about speech, form rather than content. According to Science and Technology scholars, once formalized through practices, the political constitution of (Wikipedians') expertise becomes "placeless, without histories or corruptible archives to confound its designs on power" (Schaffer, 1991) – a particularly gendered form of power, no less.

Yet Wikipedia's obsessive, automated archiving provides an extensive on-site history and archive that makes Wikipedians' maneuvers for (if not designs on) power highly legible as tactics for the preservation of male privilege. In multiple instances, for example, Wikipedians' scientific logic comes to trump the scientific evaluations of researchers examining the gender gap. **"It is important to gather evidence,"**

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?>

[title=Wikipedia\\_talk:WikiProject\\_Counteracting\\_systemic\\_bias/Gender\\_gap\\_task\\_force/Archive\\_2&oldid=625668585](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia_talk:WikiProject_Counteracting_systemic_bias/Gender_gap_task_force/Archive_2&oldid=625668585))

one Wikipedian wrote on the Gender Gap Task Force talk page. "Because in general we don't know the gender of our fellow editors, it is not clear to me how we can establish a record of the facts." "The big objection to working to end the gender gap," another Wikipedian wrote in the Gender Gap Taskforce mailing list, "has been that 'there's no proof it exists/is important/we can change it/etc'" (CarolMooreDC, 2014) – an objection that occurs in the face of **extensive research** (<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?>

[title=Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_Counteracting\\_systemic\\_bias/Gender\\_gap\\_task\\_force/research&oldid=629795573](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:WikiProject_Counteracting_systemic_bias/Gender_gap_task_force/research&oldid=629795573))

on and coverage of the gender gap. In response to those citing this scholarship come accusations of WP:NPOV. "The scientists were biased." "The methods are erroneous." "There is no real research on the topic, just feminist bluster."

At the same time as questioning "scientific" findings for their underlying logic, Wikipedians defer to scientific arguments in their justifications for including offensive content. Here, I borrow the concept of 'scientific' from Pierre Bourdieu (2000) to refer to the ways in which the language and rhetoric of science is mobilized in lawyeristic maneuvers in order to grant epistemic authority to acts of domination. Writing of one instance when some users claimed that the recurring photographs of failed breast augmentation in the mastectomy article were offensive, one Wikipedian argued that **"That's basic science: experiment and control."**

([http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Talk:Gender\\_gap/Policy\\_revolution](http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Talk:Gender_gap/Policy_revolution)) Pulling scientific maneuver and



the bias of science together, yet another user argued that **“I really don’t understand the reluctance evident throughout this project to deal in verifiable facts rather than feminist bluster.”** The result of these disruptions-of-scientific debate:

*The article on Gender bias on Wikipedia was recently tagged as needing attn. due to non-NPOV. Points of contention appear to be proper wording to neutrally present the National Science Foundation study on gender bias on WP and whether or not to include men’s right’s organization assertions regarding sexism against men on WP.*

Wikipedians argued that the research on Gender bias on Wikipedia, like those sources that document domestic violence and misogyny in other Wikipedia articles, are “biased” and “invalid” because they do not include information about men. To demonstrate this bias, Wikipedians either engage in shallow methodological critiques or cite a litany of WP:<POLICY>. Notably, they do not add the so-called missing men to these articles. Nor do they engage with falsifiable research that demonstrates all of this is just “feminist bluster.” It becomes clear that the intention is not to improve content (e.g. add the missing men or “proper” research), but to prevent the publication of content.

Like Latour’s (1988) dissenter, who distinguishes himself from the critic by doubting everything that comes into question, Wikipedians call the addition of “gendered” – meaning feminized, or anti-masculinizing – information into question because they have a stake in the metapragmatic universe affected by the pragmatic effects of such information, regardless of the authoritative-ness of the knowledge and/or knowledge producer. Take, for example, the debate around the gender gap itself, reported in major national sources and supported by research funded by agencies like the National Science Foundation.<sup>[7]</sup> Importantly, Latour continues, the dissenter is not driven by a critical desire, and has no aspirations to better the world of knowledge around him. The dissenter calls everything into question because he genuinely believes something else is at stake in excess of the topic debated – a reality that is masked by the current terms of debate. “Among the men and women with whom I am familiar,” a disruptive editor on the Gender Gap Task Force wrote, “there is no gender-related difference with respect to their comfort with markup text. If there was no identified empirical basis for this conclusion, it appears to be a prima facie example of gender bias. (WP:NPOV)” WP:NPOV, here, signifies that the articles lack the proper grounding in a masculine disposition that can go without saying because it is assumed without saying in the public sphere of knowledge production. Hence, “research” on Wikipedia’s gender gap is

not a valid argument for an article or section existing because **WP:NPOV** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral\\_point\\_of\\_view](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view)), it is not our (men's) POV and violates our sense of **WP:RECENTISM** (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Recentism>) and **WP:UNDUE** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral\\_point\\_of\\_view#Due\\_and\\_undue\\_weight](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view#Due_and_undue_weight)), and **WP:CONSENSUS** (<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Consensus>) Wikipedia is about consensus and not truth, so please respect **WP:BRD**. Despite (or perhaps because of) assertions that WP: are politically neutral and exist outside of the sociohistorical interactions, they end up absorbing, translating, and re-circulating epistemic forms of masculine domination on Wikipedia.

While “filling the gender gap” is a problematic approach to rectifying Wikipedia’s misogynist infopolitics, as I discuss in the conclusion to this article, it does reveal the ways in which gender elicits widespread fights that no other category of difference – race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, or class – does. For example, within six hours of **TMZ’s release of the Donald Sterling tapes**, in which the former owner of the Los Angeles Clippers demanded that his girlfriend “not bring black people to my games,” Wikipedians had included information and transcripts from the story – all before network news had a chance to report on the incidence. Throughout the transcript of Wikipedia edits during this controversy, there were no debates as to whether the information belonged in the article. As one Wikipedian pre-emptively wrote,

*“There is nothing biased, nor is there a violation of WP:NPOV [Neutral Point of View] by using the term “controversy” in the section title... Cgingold makes a compelling argument for inclusion of the term and his argument is backed by reliable sourcing as well – which is a policy and not an essay.”*

([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Donald\\_Sterling&oldid=619016330](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Donald_Sterling&oldid=619016330))<sup>[8]</sup>

The rapidity with which Wikipedians wrote Sterling’s racism into Wikipedia offers a stark contrast to the response to additions regarding gender violence. Take for example, the Ray Rice domestic violence controversy. Although reliable sources existed regarding Rice’s behavior, sections referencing it were repeatedly **deleted** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ray\\_Rice&oldid=596405444](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ray_Rice&oldid=596405444)) and a debate ensued on the talk page and history regarding **what constituted assault and/or domestic violence** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Ray\\_Rice&oldid=625886920](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Ray_Rice&oldid=625886920)). Further debate ensued about the reliability of the surveillance video released of Rice punching his partner: **“The video is not clear and it is not discernable whether he is trying to push her away or hitting her,”** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Ray\\_Rice&oldid=625886920](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Ray_Rice&oldid=625886920)) – reasoning that prompted administrators to semi-protect the page from editing in “false

accusations.” Not once was the authenticity or reliability of the Sterling audio tapes questioned, despite the ease with which audio can be more easily manipulated than video. The articles and talk pages of contentious figures like Bill Cosby and O.J. Simpson bear a striking resemblance to this strange lawyerism.

Similarly, the history of the Elliot Rodger article (merged with the 2014 Isla Vista Shootings) reveals debates over whether he should be included in the category **“violence against men” instead of “misogyny,”** whether the word “misogyny” should be used since he killed more men than women, and if there should even be a section entitled “misogyny” given the “bias” of the term. One editor wrote **“it [“misogyny” appearing as a motive] smelled like someone waiting until everyone else has lost interest, and then trying to sneak in a POV change.”** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=2014\\_Isla\\_Vista\\_killings/Archive\\_2](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=2014_Isla_Vista_killings/Archive_2)) Prior to that, the section referencing misogyny was anonymously **deleted** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=2014\\_Isla\\_Vista\\_killings&oldid=612443765](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=2014_Isla_Vista_killings&oldid=612443765)), sources typically accepted as **reliable questioned** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=2014\\_Isla\\_Vista\\_killings&oldid=611429138](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=2014_Isla_Vista_killings&oldid=611429138)), and an argument about whether **misogyny constituted a motive occurred** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=2014\\_Isla\\_Vista\\_killings&oldid=611424620](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=2014_Isla_Vista_killings&oldid=611424620)) – an argument that was based on Wikipedia’s definitions of neutrality, and not on reliable criminology sources detailing what a motive “is.” In the interests of so-called “neutrality” and “objectivity,” Wikipedians sought to deny Rodger’s own assertions of misogynistic intent because they revealed the ways in which something else – male privilege – is at stake on Wikipedia. As with Wikipedia itself, it is by concealing the legible forms of misogyny that male privilege can thrive undeterred and – at least ideologically – undetected.

My work adding information about campus sexual violence was met with similar forms of interaction, where the only substantial replies – substantial in the sense that they are humored by other Wikipedians, or met with more policy citations – are those that contain further policy citations. Otherwise, a Wikipedian adding information opposed by policies is met with “Please follow Wikipedia policies.” Alongside these arguments were constant references to scientific discourses of “objectivity” and “verifiability,” often without understandings of these terms outside of WP:. Thus, while a scientific discourse underlies the logical system of Wikipedian policies, it is an actuarial and lawyeristic episteme structured by a history of encyclopediac male privilege (see Bourque, 2006; Bolton, 2000) that confers expertise on Wikipedians as gatekeepers of legitimate knowledge. In the context of Wikipedia’s Gender Gap, the use of policies to “rule with reason,” is in essence a façade for maintaining a misogynist infopolitics

fundamentally opposed to information threatening to male privilege both on and beyond Wikipedia – regardless of how well-sourced. In this sense, as I describe in the next section, the whole of WP: used to exclude and censor “gendered” and thus “biased” information is reducible to one: WP:THREATENING2MEN.

## WP:THREATENING2MEN

*Editing from a neutral point of view (NPOV) means representing fairly, proportionately, and, as far as possible, without bias, all of the significant views that have been published by reliable sources on a topic... The policy is nonnegotiable and all editors and articles must follow it.*

From **WP:NPOV** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Neutral\\_point\\_of\\_view&oldid=627651011](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view&oldid=627651011))

In this section, I focus on the repetitive claims to neutrality made through the panoply of WP:THREATENING2MEN. Central to these, and indeed a policy that appears to be core in Wikipedians’ resistance to “gendered” information in general, is WP:NPOV (Neutral Point of View). The first time I encountered WP:NPOV while writing about campus sexual violence on Wikipedia was in relation to edits in the leads of articles. The lead, or the first paragraph of a Wikipedia article, “should define the topic, establish context... and summarize the most important points, including any prominent controversies.” In response to adding information about campus sexual violence at the University of Chicago, one user wrote on **my talk page**:

*Per WP:MOS/LEAD, we should not “violate Wikipedia:Neutral point of view by giving undue attention to less important controversies in the lead section.” In the scope of the University of Chicago’s 125-year history, a current sexual assault investigation (not an accusation or a charge, but merely an investigation), which is also being carried out on several other universities, is not so fundamental that it should be discussed in the very first paragraph of the lead.*

Following a lengthy debate about the appropriateness of this information for leads, I began adding “controversies” sections as per consensus at the Wikipedia University project page. These were modeled after the longstanding information at Occidental College, which has been a leader in campus sexual violence activism. Where information about campus sexual violence wasn’t necessarily available in the “defining” part of the article, it was prominently displayed in the table of contents for each article. Based on consensus, I also created a category entitled “CAT:Schools under

investigation for Title IX violations.” Within two weeks, having passed administrative review that verified the category as legitimate, a group of Wikipedians nominated the category for deletion. WP:NPOV was central in the discussion that was meant to lead to a consensus – which is actually processed as a majoritarian vote, rather than a form of compromise. This type of consensus becomes a way of shutting out dissenting or different perspectives, rather than creating a “comprehensive” encyclopedia.

From these examples, it appears that WP:NPOV is an amorphous category, in which Wikipedians experience an affront to a poorly defined notion of objectivity. This amorphousness of neutrality and objectivity is not restricted to edits regarding campus sexual violence. As information about current Title IX investigations and previous Title IX/Clery violations at colleges and universities was deleted, Wikipedians protested a violation of a metaphysical neutrality that was not defined by benchmarks, but rather “feelings” that “political” information was not information at all. Because campus sexual violence disproportionately affects women, who are located within institutions traditionally gendered male, and because the experience of campuses as sexually violent social spheres exists outside of the predominantly masculine standpoint epistemology of Wikipedians, to these men, adding information about campus sexual violence “felt like” a front for “inserting politics” into otherwise neutral (not social) spheres of information (Raval, 2014). To “rule with reason” by feeling – and not by “objective” (i.e., external) benchmarks – seems to be an internal contradiction lost on these Wikipedians.

Perhaps the most demonstrative case of feeling defining neutrality was in regard to the category that I created to organize schools that were under investigation by the Department of Education. Categories function as an indexing tool, showing relationships among discrete articles. In an **administrative debate about the “value” of the category** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Categories\\_for\\_discussion/Log/2014\\_July\\_25&oldid=626402336](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Categories_for_discussion/Log/2014_July_25&oldid=626402336)), one editor wrote that

*Speaking as a practicing lawyer, I find this category offensive. If we keep it, I suggest we rename it “Universities that have been accused of Title IX violations, but have yet to be proven culpable of anything.” Quite simply, this statement flies in the face of WP:NPOV, the presumption of innocence, and common sense. And from a Wikipedia category guidelines perspective, the category is not a defining characteristic. As usual, the most controversial XfDs always involved editors with an agenda.<sup>[9]</sup>*

The Wikipedian's assumption here is that the creation of the category was not driven by the verifiable, factual nature of the listing of schools under investigation for Title IX violations as a historical precedent, but a deeper feminist conspiracy against some undefined neutrality on Wikipedia and against universities more generally. Throughout the comment, this Wikipedian makes both metapragmatic gestures to forms of expertise – “Speaking as a practicing lawyer, “ “It flies in the face of WP:NPOV, the presumption of innocence, and common sense.” The Wikiedian further appeals to a situated form of universal knowledge called common sense, which requires no supportive citations. How, for instance, could this Wikipedian speak from a neutral point of view, if, “speaking as a practicing lawyer, I find this category offensive”? And how does one's editing agenda – taken neutrally as things people like to edit, pedantically as an accusation of being “political” – preclude the facticity of information? The situatedness of knowledge being pointed out here is then turned on its head by another commenter advocating for deletion. “Temporary cat[egory] at best, non-defining [i.e. does not carry an essence of the topic] at worst, subjective because “by whom” is wholly omitted. Category:Foos being investigated for XXX by YYY.” In this terse and telegraphic phrase, this user demands that the encyclopedic subject be clearly grounded in its “gendered” social position to prove it is subjective, not objective like the knowledge of the Wikipedian himself.

Not all subjective positions of knowing, however, are created equal. Had I countered the XfD (Categories for Discussion/Deletion) arguments with “speaking as a survivor” or “speaking as a sociologist who researches sexual violence” or “as a student at xxx college,” my appeals would have readily been described as biased and not objective. Why, then, is it possible for one user to situate their professional knowledge as authoritative over other forms? At its surface, it might appear that the answer would lie in the masculine position of the arguer – “I am a lawyer” — a phrase and positionality that is historically grounded in a masculine profession of prestige and signifier of wealth which confers more power on the speaker than “I am a sociologist with expertise in sexual violence/gender/male privilege” (particularly true in the current anti-intellectual climate of Wikipedia and the broader United States). Yet, also important to highlight is the way in which “I am a lawyer” resonates with the form of expertise at hand. Where scientific experts have access to facts that are beyond dispute – or authority to declare them as such – the lawyer can only generate facts by connecting legal statements with other legal statements in ways that systematically erase the details from which these emerge because it is oriented to the supreme value of the social and not to reality (Latour, 2009:202). “I am a lawyer,” whether the person

was a lawyer or not, is an enunciation of, and resonates with, the lawyeristic dimensions of Wikipedia's debates – and the conventional (not published) goal of Wikipedia process.

But, just as my male privilege as a Wikipedian ends at the point in which I endanger male privilege (and become mistaken as a “female” editor), so too does the power of the lawyeristic “relation of ruling” (Smith 1990) end when it confronts misogyny.

Responding to the first “lawyer,” another Wikipedian wrote that **“Dirtlawyer is not the only attorney on wikipedia... Title IX is not a criminal statute, it's a civil rights statute.”**

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?>

[title=Wikipedia:Articles\\_for\\_deletion/List\\_of\\_American\\_higher\\_education\\_institutions\\_with\\_open\\_Title\\_IX\\_sexual\\_violence\\_i](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Articles_for_deletion/List_of_American_higher_education_institutions_with_open_Title_IX_sexual_violence_i)

The initial lawyers response was to state that other lawyers had advocated for deletion as well, making this Wikipedian's legal appeal moot in the face of consensus. To be a lawyer, then, is to be authoritative in arguing against threats to male privilege and misogyny, yet irrelevant if not biased when threatening male privilege. Such is the nature of what Dorothy Smith has called relations of ruling, wherein positions that legitimate “the set of categories, the development of methods of filling categories, and of articulation descriptive categories... to constitute ‘what actually happened’” are granted authority only insofar as they “arise in and as part of an operation of the state and professional extensions of state interest” (Smith, 1990:144) One need only replace “state” with Wikipedia to make sense of the status of the lawyeristic standpoint.

Where WP:NPOV and accusations of “biased” standpoints often appear as an umbrella responses to “bias” – responses based on Wikipedians' metaphysical position that render particular social relationships as objects – they lack a temporal dimension. Thus, these responses are vulnerable to historical arguments and information, such as the long history of campus sexual violence in the United States. Wikipedians therefore attempt to use an “objectified” *longue duree* to justify the exclusion of campus sexual violence from Wikipedia pages. They do so through two arguments, WP:UNDUE and WP:RECENTISM, the former often implied in the latter. **WP:RECENTISM**

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Recentism&oldid=613590518> ) refers to

*writing or editing without a long-term, historical view, thereby inflating the importance of a topic that has received recent public attention and possibly resulting in... the muddling or diffusion of the timeless facts of a subject, previously recognized by Wikipedian consensus.*

In turn, **WP:UNDUE** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Neutral\\_point\\_of\\_view&oldid=627651011](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view&oldid=627651011)) refers to giving a topic “undue weight,” arguing that “articles should not give minority views or aspects as much of, or as detailed, a description as more widely held views or widely supported aspects.” To add an important detail from the contemporary moment, that colleges and universities have been “put on notice” fails to take into account the long history of universities (see above quote regarding University of Chicago), and is clearly being asserted because of a minority viewpoint that believes it is important. “This was removed due to WP:RECENTISM and WP:UNDUE. If something comes from the investigation, then perhaps it makes sense to include it,” a Wikipedian wrote in an **edit summary** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The\\_Catholic\\_University\\_of\\_America&oldid=628527057](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Catholic_University_of_America&oldid=628527057)) for the Catholic University of America. Another Wikipedian argued in the **Wikipedia University Project** ([https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia\\_talk:WikiProject\\_Universities/Archive\\_9&oldid=627345275](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia_talk:WikiProject_Universities/Archive_9&oldid=627345275)) that “This controversy is not major in the scope of these universities’ history.” In short, the meaning of WP:RECENTISM and WP:UNDUE is supported by a history that Wikipedians write themselves, yet presume to exist as an object outside of their own creation. One Wikipedian sums this up in his explanation of why campus sexual violence did not belong on the **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:University\\_of\\_North\\_Carolina\\_at\\_Chapel\\_Hill&oldid=617848858](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:University_of_North_Carolina_at_Chapel_Hill&oldid=617848858)) article, writing that

*As it is, this [campus sexual assault controversy] is a largely unnoteworthy [sic] case as it relates to the university as a whole, which is what this article is about. I'm sure over the 200+ years the university has been open, there have been literally hundreds of controversies far more notable than this one, so I can't see a reason why this 1 case would get its own section in the article.*

Indeed, this future-oriented argument has a name and associated Wikipedia policy: **WP:10YEAREST**. “In ten years will this addition still appear relevant?” the policy reads. As one Wikipedian wrote, nominating the article on the **Title IX investigation announcement made by the Office of Civil Rights in 2014** for deletion,

*I do not believe that a list of schools under investigation has “enduring historical significance.” True, this is the first time the schools under investigation have been publicly named, but what about all the schools that have been investigated in the past? What about those that will be investigated in the future? I don't think an investigation of this nature is noteworthy. If something comes of those investigations, then perhaps, but not a routine investigation by itself. The OCR investigates all types of complaints all across the country. We don't have, for*



*example, a List of Schools with Open Discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin investigations for example. This article fails the WP:10 year test.*

This Wikipedian does not “believe” that there will be any significance. As the WP:10YEARTEST continues, “Editors writing today do not have a historical perspective on today’s events, and should not pretend to have a crystal ball.” On what grounds, then, does the above user have a policy driven argument? How, one might ask of the policy, does one know that an event will not be important in ten years? The short answer is, based on my analysis and experience so far, by adhering to a strictly enforced, yet highly implicit, masculine standpoint epistemology. Wikipedian expertise is, as I previously asserted, a conventional recognition of legitimacy.

Transformed into a thing without creator, an object of history with no history itself, the exclusion of campus sexual violence from college and university Wikipedia articles itself becomes the reason for its exclusion from Wikipedia articles – regardless of the objective facts about campus sexual violence, or its long history. In instances when such a history is provided, it is deleted for “WP:UNDUE,” because it is not recorded for other universities. When articles are provided to create such a history, as was the case in one instance, it was renamed by another Wikipedian, and then a third argued that based on the name it was not an appropriate article. When a Wikipedian claimed that **the removal of information about campus sexual violence was disruptive**

([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Michigan\\_State\\_University&oldid=628873891](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Michigan_State_University&oldid=628873891)), pointing to the existing article on “Higher Education Institutions Announced in Title IX and Clery Investigation,” the Wikipedian erasing the content **nominated the article on the investigations for deletion** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Articles_for_deletion/List_of_American_higher_education_institutions_with_open_Title_IX_sexual_violence_i)

[title=Wikipedia:Articles\\_for\\_deletion/List\\_of\\_American\\_higher\\_education\\_institutions\\_with\\_open\\_Title\\_IX\\_sexual\\_violence\\_i](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Articles_for_deletion/List_of_American_higher_education_institutions_with_open_Title_IX_sexual_violence_i)) in order to justify future deletions of information about campus sexual violence from university and college pages.

The surface assertion here, of course, is that American colleges and universities do not have a long history of sexual violence because it is not present on Wikipedia pages. One Wikipedian suggests as much on the talk page for the **Universities project**

([https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia\\_talk:WikiProject\\_Universities/Archive\\_9&oldid=627345275](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia_talk:WikiProject_Universities/Archive_9&oldid=627345275)), arguing that adding information about campus sexual violence creates an imbalance in information. “First, an investigation is just an investigation... I’m sure there have been many investigations over the years, but these would be highlighted just because they’re currently in

progress.” With few exceptions (e.g., Occidental College), none of the Wikipedia pages for colleges and universities included on the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights list of investigations have information regarding campus sexual violence – despite some universities being found in non-compliance on multiple instances. That this information is missing reflects not simply an oversight but a missed sight: the lack of a point of view in which sexual violence is important to the histories of American colleges and universities. This is the very point of view occluded by WP:THREATENING2MEN.

Citing a veritable panoply of WP: is the primary tactic for “wearing down” political opposition to the status quo, and WP:THREATENING2MEN is forged in a battle that goes relatively unseen as men and women alike abandon the collaborative work of writing Wikipedia out of sheer exhaustion. Through WikiLawyering, as it is referred to on Wikipedia, facts external to the social sphere in which WP:THREATENING2MEN is crafted are clearly in violation of WP:THREATENING2MEN. For many potential Wikipedians invested in adding “controversial” content about gender – again, for Wikipedians, meaning women – the uneven amount of time spent debating whether or not the *New York Times* or Department of Education are reliable sources via an obscure, self-referential and seemingly infinite set of policies is hardly worth the work of contributing – in part because there is no real contribution made by these debates, in which consensus is reached through one-sided decisions to erase “biased” information. That consensus process is a crucial piece of the hegemony of the asshole consensus.

## The Hegemony of the Asshole Consensus

Where the endless citations of policies constitute the erosive dimension of hegemony, the consensus process promotes and facilitates resignation to the hegemony of the asshole consensus. Asshole, here, is a theoretical concept and not (simply) a pejorative: assholes, Aaron James (2012) argues, are driven by a sense of self-entitlement that is justified by pragmatic reasoning in the face of moral or epistemic debates. In order for the hermeneutic circle that constitutes WP:THREATENING2MEN to remain tightly sealed, and thus the self-entitlement of Wikipedians fully realized, there is a strong need for social forms of enforcement, or what Antonio Gramsci has called relations of force: symbolically violent forms of interaction that seek to demonstrate the necessary and sufficient conditions for public participation in Wikipedia.

The social benefits and/or costs of Wikipedia's reliance on consensus for producing authoritative qua factually accurate information has been widely debated in terms of reliability (Reagle, 2010; Bruns, 2008; Lih, 2009; Leitch, 2014; Burke, 2012). What is often missing from this debate, however, are the terms on which and through which consensus is produced. Where the exhausting circularity of WP:THREATENING2MEN chases off a majority of potential Wikipedia editors, my experience of writing campus sexual violence into Wikipedia revealed the extent to which those that remain are anything but free to contribute in ways they see fit – and are often subjected to implicit threats or explicit acts of harassment. Rather than concentrate on the disjunction between ideal consensus and its failed practice, this section examines Wikipedians' practice of consensus making, particularly as it revolves around forms of coercion via anticipation, paranoia, and experiences of harassment that were intended to fortify the masculine subject position that forms the conventional zero-degree of knowledge production on Wikipedia. Yet, the binary between harasser/harassed does not reflect the complex reality of Wikipedia's environment. What makes Wikipedia unique, or what makes Wikipedians a unique type of asshole, to re-summon Aaron James, is their combined ability to force everyone around them to resign to being an asshole too as a strange survival strategy.

As I mentioned in the introduction, citing Wikipedia's **consensus policy**

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Consensus&oldid=626048970> ),

*Consensus is Wikipedia's fundamental model for editorial decision-making, and is marked by addressing legitimate concerns held by editors through a process of compromise while following Wikipedia policies.*

In the consensus process, editors do not vote or jury, but rather engage in a “rational” and “civil” conversation about the value of information based on adherence to Wikipedia's policies. The success or failure of consensus has different results depending on the level of conversation. For deletion, for instance, positive consensus results in the deletion of the content under debate. In the instance of the category of “2014 Announcement of Schools Under Investigation for Mishandling Campus Sexual Violence,” consensus was defined through a majoritarian process where people “voted” for removal because of violations of WP:THREATENING2MEN, with one person – me, the creator – “voting” to keep the category. Like other previous contradictions, the fact that consensus was reached by voting was lost on these Wikipedians.

This, then, constitutes the asshole consensus: consensus about the exclusion of information produced out of a collective, metapragmatic investment in WP:THREATENING2MEN, rather than meeting Wikipedia's goal of being the most comprehensive encyclopedia on Earth. Yet the asshole consensus is not totalitarian, nor necessarily a conspiracy, but, rather, a complex hegemonic structure that is produced out of erosion and resignation. On multiple occasions, I received messages of support via email and Wikipedia's messaging service. As one messenger wrote, "This work is really important to me, and I wish I could help. But if I do these guys will flip all of my revisions. I'm sorry." Another discussed how important this information could be. "We should definitely document all of this history and add it. But I can't. I get enough shit for writing about women mathematicians. I won't even weigh in on the debate because of how toxic it is." As Joseph McGlynn and Brian Richardson (2013) write about the experiences of whistleblowers at colleges and universities, individuals use forms of moral support in private, exacerbating – if not participating in – the public alienation of dissenting voices.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony provides one framework for making sense of this problem on Wikipedia. As Gramsci writes in the unabridged version of the *Prison Notebooks*,

*The hegemony of a central leadership over the intellectuals has these two strategic lines: "a general conception of life," a philosophy which gives it adherents a "dignity" to set against the dominant ideologies of a principle struggle; [and] a scholastic program which interests the fraction of the intellectuals that is most homogenous and the most numerous and provides them with an appropriate activity in their technical field.*

With reference to dignity and the scholastic program, Gramsci's hegemony is not a "consent to domination" in exchange for symbolic and economic resources," but rather, "I resign to domination, and reproducing that domination, in order to maintain the dignity that is itself intimately connected to the material reward for doing so." In short, where many potential editors simply walk away, Wikipedians resign to the asshole consensus in order to move through the Wikipedia world more easily – an ease made possible through a form of male privilege that is accessible to editors regardless of gender, given Wikipedia's baseline assumptions that everyone is a "he" until proved otherwise.

Relations of force as the implications of practice, rather than simply the intentions of ideology, are core to coercing consensus on Wikipedia, and other Wikipedians' fears of being harassed are not unfounded. In the case above, where the list of campuses under investigation named by the OCR was nominated for deletion, the nominator had created multiple accounts (or "sockpuppets") to simultaneously "vote" for deletion, and remove information from other campuses. This form of "sockpuppet" harassment went beyond reverting my work on sexual violence; the editor went through my history and **un-deleted personal attacks previously made by another harassing editor**

([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Sandra\\_Morgen&oldid=629065660](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Sandra_Morgen&oldid=629065660)), and went as far as

**reporting me as "disruptive" to administrators** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Administrators%27_noticeboard/Incidents&diff=prev&oldid=629765403)

[title=Wikipedia:Administrators%27\\_noticeboard/Incidents&diff=prev&oldid=629765403](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Administrators%27_noticeboard/Incidents&diff=prev&oldid=629765403)).<sup>[10]</sup> When the sockpuppet was discovered, other "deletionists" rallied around maintaining the sockpuppet's edits declaring him to be a victim of censorship. The outsiders had become the oppressors, as is so often the rhetorical move in debates about gender and digital culture in the past months (Sparrow, 2014).

In some cases, the coercive nature of consent was such that individuals who had previously sent me messages of support then publicly supported the deletion of information. This was most typically the case when individuals expected to weigh in (either because of their status as editors working on college and university pages, or because of the particular place or article being written) at first resisted doing so because of their support for the inclusion of this information. When they did register opposition, they focused on the failure or challenge to Wikipedia policies, and not the content per se, for removing content or voicing support for removal. Their deference, to return to James, disregards the importance of information. Framed both by a moral argument for equal representations of experiences at universities and a moral argument for writing "comprehensive histories" of colleges and universities, these editors defer to pragmatic guidelines that are made to appear external to, and not implicated in, the social relations of force deployed in debates about including information about campus sexual violence.

In short, the hegemony of the asshole consensus has the power to transform everyone into an asshole. But the blame does not lie with every user. I discuss the conflicted motives of some Wikipedians in order to remind us that Wikipedians' motivations are complex webs of practice that are not reducible to a misogynist intention in all cases. Still, we should not discount the impacts of these complex behaviors – however

ideological, however resignatory – in producing and maintaining a hostile environment on Wikipedia.

## What is to be done?

As demonstrated by the Wikipedia Research mailing list, programmer-researchers have been focused on imagining sociotechnical fixes not simply to Wikipedia's gender gap, but to editor attrition in general. Yet a perusal of the numerous solutions proposed on the list, and the Wikimedia Grant-funded research projects, demonstrates how these “sociotechnical” solutions tend to be technological fixes to a social problem – that Wikipedians are assholes, and it is affecting the content – rather than sociotechnical solutions to fighting off, or minimizing, the negative effects of the hegemony of the asshole consensus. Simultaneously, focusing technology on decreasing exposure to assholes, or increasing the response to asshole-ish actions, individualizes misogyny in relation to information politics, as if misogyny is a bad personality trait rather than a historical strategy for the maintenance and operationalization of male privilege.

Problematically, the Wikimedia Foundation's rhetoric of the gender gap may very well have been the “social” fix to the hegemony of the asshole consensus. Frequently cited research articles from the early years of the “gender gap” rhetoric alluded to the ways in which increasing the number of women could “civilize” Wikipedian debates (Wooley et al., 2010), with more recent research suggesting the same (Iosub, 2014). In doing so, they have taken an epistemological problem – a lack of a space of multiple points of view – and attempted an ontological solution – add more women, stir (Harding, 1986). The problem, however, is that the “gender gap,” as rhetorical strategy and frame, both enunciates gender as a “woman problem” and places the burden of transforming Wikipedia on the shoulders of women. However, as we have seen, there are women who are part of the asshole consensus, who use misogynist techniques alongside men to protect a privileged status that allows them to move through Wikipedia in uninhibited ways. This is the nature of misogynist infopolitics: conformance to sexist norms or ejection from the game.

The rhetoric of the gender gap fails to do the very real and actual cultural work necessary for transforming Wikipedia into an equitable space. Indeed, it may actually do more harm than good: colleges and universities, for example, have approached diversity initiatives, increasing a phenotypical diversity (ontological issue) to counter forms of discrimination (epistemological/cultural issue) that institutions of higher

education were in part responsible for producing. The result for American colleges and universities is the very campus sexual violence epidemic I attempted to write into Wikipedia. And, while the consequences for dumping women into the violent space of Wikipedia may not be as dire, there is an ethical dimension to subjecting people historically marginalized by symbolic violence to that very same symbolic violence in order to further the enterprise of “making Wikipedia better.” Fixing Wikipedia, to bring these threads together, will fix the gender gap; throwing women into the gender gap will not fix Wikipedia.

Where WP:THREATENING2MEN constitutes the ways banal policies are transformed into tools for domination, “the hegemony of the asshole consensus” names the symbolic violence that I describe above. In effect, this violence restrains Wikipedia’s perspectives. To make Wikipedia better, then, requires not simply the addition of women, but the creation of a space of multiple points of view. Doing so will first require a major cultural shift amongst Wikipedians. Given the centrality of WP:THREATENING2MEN – that entirely self-referential system of pragmatic justifications that transforms everyone into an asshole – the best start may be to stop arguing about Wikipedia’s policies for inclusivity, or at minimum, reduce the number of policies to a set of concretely defined criteria. In light of the fact that individuals abuse the WP: system as a means of policing and censorship, while ignoring the policies that encourage collaboration, if Wikipedia were to require that debates occur on the terrain of facts, rather than in the adversarial terrains of “law” and “lawyerism,” that would go far in confronting the misogyny facilitated by WP:THREATENING2MEN and the hegemony of the asshole consensus.

Transforming policies would also serve as an epistemological rupture, through which Wikipedians would be forced to leave behind the various pretensions and habitus generated through its current toxic culture to reformulate what Wikipedia represents (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) — a space where facts are grounded in multiple points of view rather than censored when they deviate from a single monolithic one. In order to establish healthier habits and traditions, the Wikimedia Foundation would have to actively cultivate a climate of respect. Culture, Raymond Williams (1985) would be quick to point out, is derived from cultivation.

The broader significance of this paper thus lies in the “cultural” collusion between misogynist technologies of seemingly neutral policies and the silence those policies are used to enforce in sites of knowledge where male privilege understands itself to be

under attack. In this way, the online community of Wikipedia is homologous to many colleges' and universities' bureaucratic responses to campus sexual violence. Arguments for stricter sanctions on and control over rape-supportive subcultures, particularly athletics and Greek life (Kalof, 1993; McMahan, 2007; Flood, 2003; Armstrong and Hamilton, 2013; Sanday, 2007), are met with responses regarding "limitation of resources" and "best interests of students." Faculty members who step out of line are frequently described as "difficult people" who are unable to "understand how the rules work" – an argument often made by discrediting empirical evidence or personal experience through lawyeristic, actuarial arguments about scientific validity (Feldman, 2005), as is done on Wikipedia. All of this is to say that Wikipedia exists as a microcosm – perhaps an amplification – of a cultural moment when campus sexual assault is coming to the fore of societal consciousness in domains traditionally controlled by men. To return briefly with the epigram with which I began this essay, then, it is in this way that Wikipedia colludes with other institutions, allowing campus sexual violence to breed in the shadows created through institutional secrecy. What is needed is an end to WP:THREATENING2MEN and the hegemony of the asshole consensus in all of its institutional manifestations.

## Acknowledgements

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## Figures

## Footnotes

1. I use the notation WP:<POLICY> and its plural (<POLICIES>) to discuss Wikipedia's pre-established and annotated guidelines, as both a mark up strategy (i.e., shortlink HTML) and rhetorical maneuver.



2. The argument that editors writing about gender violence on Wikipedia are engaged in a “gender war” comes from a response to work on Wikipedia’s **Gender Gap Task Force** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_Counteracting\\_systemic\\_bias/Gender\\_gap\\_task\\_force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Counteracting_systemic_bias/Gender_gap_task_force)).

3. Here, I join a number of commentators. Tom Simonite, for example, describes Wikipedians as “estimated to be 90 percent male, [they] operates a crushing bureaucracy with an often abrasive atmosphere that deters newcomers who might increase participation in Wikipedia and broaden its coverage.” The vicious debates occurring on Wikipedia, facilitated by consensus and Wikipedia policies, led Joe Miller to describe Wikipedia as a fight to the death with the lowest possible stakes. Justine Cassell similarly described Wikipedia: “rather than seeming like collaborations around the construction of knowledge, [talk pages] are full of descriptions of “edit-warring” — where successive editors try to cancel each others’ contributions out — and bitter, contentious arguments about the accuracy of conflicting points of view.” According to Cassell, the most adversely affected group of users are women. Self-described as the “Encyclopedia anyone can edit,” Wikipedia has become known among journalists and social commentators as the encyclopedia anyone can, but only a few do, edit.

4. In many ways, my approach in this essay is inspired by a gap in the literature on expertise in science and technology studies – a gap that became visible only when Wikipedians were described as “ruling with reason.” Although the so-called Third Wave of Science and Technology Studies has examined the role of experts and expertise in the production and formation of structures of governance (Collins & Evans, 2002) – the so-called “rule of experts (Mitchell, 2002)– they have failed to examine the afterlives of forms of expertise beyond or in excess of state-sanctioned knowledge production. The topic of “expert rule” vis-à-vis Wikipedians’ “ruling with reason” is central in this essay: how do those Wikipedians invested in forms of male privilege mobilize tactics of expertise to grasp at crumbling forms of male privilege in an institution committed to the destruction of said privilege? Or, to put it more abruptly, how do these Wikipedians mobilize expertise as they lose their standing to “rule with [their] reason”?

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**Footnotes** ( returns to text)

1. I use the notation WP:<POLICY> and its plural (<POLICIES>) to discuss Wikipedia’s pre-established and annotated guidelines, as both a mark up strategy (i.e., shortlink HTML) and rhetorical maneuver.
2. The argument that editors writing about gender violence on Wikipedia are engaged in a “gender war” comes from a response to work on Wikipedia’s **Gender Gap Task Force**.
3. Here, I join a number of commentators. Tom Simonite, for example, describes Wikipedians as “estimated to be 90 percent male, [they] operates a crushing bureaucracy with an often abrasive atmosphere that deters newcomers who might increase participation in Wikipedia and broaden its coverage.” The vicious debates occurring on Wikipedia, facilitated by consensus and Wikipedia policies, led Joe Miller to describe Wikipedia as a fight to the death with the lowest possible stakes. Justine Cassell similarly described Wikipedia: “rather than seeming like collaborations around the construction of knowledge, [talk pages] are full of descriptions of “edit-warring” — where successive editors try to cancel each others’ contributions out — and bitter, contentious arguments about the accuracy of conflicting points of view.” According to Cassell, the most adversely affected group of users are women. Self-described as the “Encyclopedia anyone can edit,” Wikipedia has become known among journalists and social commentators as the encyclopedia anyone can, but only a few do, edit.

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**Bryce Peake** (<https://adanewmedia.org/author/brycepeake>)

Bryce Peake is an Assistant Professor of Media & Communication Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). A media anthropologist and historian of communication technology, his research focuses on media technosciences, information politics, feminist social theory, and research praxis in politically contested spaces. His work has been published in 'Cultural Studies,' 'Communication & Critical Cultural Studies,' AnthropologyNOW, and 'Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology.'

## 5 THOUGHTS ON “WP:THREATENING2MEN: MISOGYNIST INFOPOLITICS AND THE HEGEMONY OF THE ASSHOLE CONSENSUS ON ENGLISH WIKIPEDIA”

Pingback: [Now live: Ada Issue no. 7: Open Call! |](#)



**Tassie Gniady**

**JUNE 10, 2015 AT 9:17 AM**

Hi,

I am on the FemTech Wikipedia Committee (which is still largely dormant after losing Adrienne), and I wonder if re-creating the page under “Sexual Violence in Secondary Education in the United States” would help. It would follow the structure that already seems to be set up.

I’d love to help, so let me know how I can be of assistance.

Pingback: [read in july 2015 | Ba Jin](#)

Pingback: **[UVA Library Sponsors Edit-a-Ton on Sexual Violence at Universities | News and Announcements](#)**

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**Joan Robinson**

**NOVEMBER 3, 2016 AT 7:05 AM**

This is a really interesting and important contribution to ongoing conversations about knowledge, expertise, and democracy. And the title is just brilliant.



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