**Where Are the Women in Wikipedia?**

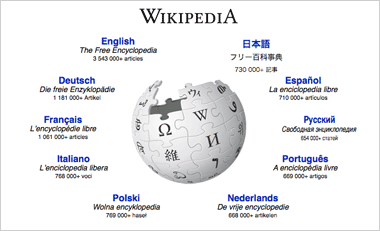
Why are there so many more men than women contributing to a "free encyclopedia that anyone can edit"?

# <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/>

#### ****Updated**** February 3, 2011 06:10 PM

## Where Are the Women in Wikipedia?

#### Introduction



Wikipedia, the ["free encyclopedia that anyone can edit,"](http://www.wikipedia.org/) has more than 3.5 million articles in English covering nearly every subject under the sun. Every day, hundreds of thousands of people go there to add information or create new pages (the site offers straightforward [instructions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About#Contributing_to_Wikipedia)). Yet despite the site's openness, [surveys suggest](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/31/business/media/31link.html) that [less than 15 percent](http://www.wikipediasurvey.org/docs/Wikipedia_Overview_15March2010-FINAL.pdf) of Wikipedia's contributors are women. The Wikipedia Foundation has set a goal to raise the share of female contributors to 25 percent by 2015.   
  
What accounts for this imbalance? Is there something about Wikipedia's format and purpose that attracts more male contributors (other sites like Flickr and Yelp [do not appear to have this gender gap](http://www.ignitesocialmedia.com/2010-social-network-analysis-report/))? Are there ways to alter this gap?

**Editing Wars Behind the Scenes**

**Updated** February 3, 2011, 12:34 PM

[**Justine Cassell**](http://www.justinecassell.com/) is a professor and the director of the Human-Computer Interaction Institute at Carnegie Mellon University.

It’s worth distinguishing between two different kinds of gender imbalance in Wikipedia. One is the relative length of articles and the number of articles that concern “women’s interests” (the [Times article](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/31/business/media/31link.html) cites friendship bracelets and “Sex and the City”) vs. articles that concern “men’s interests” ("The Simpsons" and Grand Theft Auto). The second is the number of women who contribute vs. men who contribute overall.

A woman who wishes to share knowledge with others might not choose to be part of a forum where engaging in deleting others’ words is key.

I believe we might find different reasons for the two different kinds of imbalance. But first we might ask, why should we care at all — do we want women to contribute to Wikipedia because for diversity’s sake alone?

We care because this gender imbalance raises the possibility that “citizen-generated media” are not actually generated by all citizens, and that the democracy that Wikipedia aspires to may in fact ignore the voices of 50 percent of the population. This is indeed something to worry about.

It’s not worrisome because women *should* spend their time contributing to an online encyclopedia (as one mother told me when I was researching girls’ use of videogames, “what could possibly be wrong with the fact that my daughter is spending her time with real people rather than computer game characters?”). It’s worrisome because Wikipedia is ever more powerful as the canon, the go-to source of “knowledge.” And if women aren’t contributing, then that putatively exhaustive body of knowledge is only reflecting the knowledge of some of our citizens (and I’m guessing that gender is not the only demographic that is imbalanced in Wikipedia).

As for the source of the gender imbalance, I think it may be revealed if we compare what Wikipedia looks like from the outside vs. what it looks like to a contributor. To those of us who don’t spend time contributing, it does indeed look like Wikipedia is a democracy of knowledge — a place where all we know is gathered together and made available to all of us equally. Who wouldn’t want to be involved in such a lofty enterprise?

From the inside, on the other hand, Wikipedia may feel like a fight to get one’s voice heard. One gets a sense of this insider view from looking at the “talk page” of many articles, which rather than seeming like collaborations around the construction of knowledge, 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. Flickr users don’t remove each others’ photos. Youtube videos inspire passionate debate, but one’s contributions are not erased.

Despite Wikipedia’s stated principle of the need to maintain a neutral point of view, the reality is that it is not enough to “know something” about friendship bracelets or “Sex and the City.” To have one’s words listened to on Wikipedia, often one must have to debate, defend, and insist that one’s point of view is the only valid one.

There is, therefore, a certain disparity between the public goals of Wikipedia — to make all knowledge available to all people through a social and collaborative process of knowledge construction -- and the private practices of Wikipedia, where one truth may have to be defended against opposing points of view, and one’s words may need to be protected against others who seek to wipe them out.

This is the backdrop for any discussion of why there might be fewer female contributors on Wikipedia, and what to do about it. I hope that in 2011 I don’t need to defend the fact that women know as much as men do, can express themselves as clearly, and have just as much ability to work collaboratively to construct bodies of knowledge. It is also clear that women can defend their point of view as well as men can. And certainly many women are contentious, fond of debate, and happy to put forward and defend their own points of view.

However, it is still the case in American society that debate, contention, and vigorous defense of one’s position is often still seen as a male stance, and women’s use of these speech styles can call forth negative evaluations. Women may be negatively judged for speaking their mind in clear ways and defending their position. A woman who wishes to collaboratively construct knowledge and share it with others might not choose to do so as part of a forum where engaging in debate and deleting others’ words is key.

A woman who wishes to share what she knows with others may not want bitter altercation and successive edit wars. Even Sue Gardner, executive director of the Wikipedia Foundation, seems reticent about defending her perspective on gender in Wikipedia. As she says in the [Times article](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/31/business/media/31link.html): “Gender is a huge hot-button issue for lots of people who feel strongly about it. I am not interested in triggering those strong feelings.”

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[[nna North](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/the-antisocial-factor)Previous Contributor **The Antisocial Factor** Anna North](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/the-antisocial-factor) [[oseph M. Reagle](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone)Next Contributor **'Open' Doesn't Include Everyone** Joseph M. Reagle](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone)

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[Frunobulax](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/50176648/activities.html)

Chicago

February 2nd, 2011 7:08 pm

Women are simply smarter than men and are sticking with the Encyclopedia Brittanica.

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[ronzoni2](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/3498199/activities.html)

NJ

February 2nd, 2011 10:54 pm

II think this article is bunk. There are plenty of women who like a fight. I know. I've had a couple for bosses and I have a wife.

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[Banana Republic](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/58843593/activities.html)

Illinois

February 2nd, 2011 11:58 pm

If you edit Wikipedia, you're probably a big nerd. Try telling people in your workplace you edit articles on Wikipdia in your spare time, you probably won't be invited to the next mixer. Since most nerds are usually men (for whatever reason), it follows that Wikipedia editors are going to be men as well.  
Sorry, but it doesn't take more than some common sense to figure that out.

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[CC](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/48132620/activities.html)

CA

February 3rd, 2011 12:44 am

The whole 'editing wars' phenomena made me stop contributing and leave a specialized 'wiki' site for a subject about which I have both knowledge and passion. Once I stepped in as a participant, I realized that what I was getting into was an unpleasant playground brawl, with few (or changing rules), and just the loudest & most persistent getting their way. Like many women, I have way too much to do in the 'real' world to spend time hashing and re-hashing the same fights in the virtual one.

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[Madbear](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/45114184/activities.html)

Denver, CO

February 3rd, 2011 12:50 am

On the internet, no-one knows what gender you are.

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[Larry](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/101621/activities.html)

l.a.

February 3rd, 2011 12:58 am

I think the survey merely establishes what has been evident anecdotally: WikiPedia is fanboy central, (men in their 20s) and is a magnet for factoid zealots, coding tweakers and the worst sort of rumor mongering. WikiPedia's professed "live long and prosper" philosophy in which all knowledge is welcome is a lot of rubbish, at least to anyone who has ever lost a day's work to some troll who has "adopted" a page and fights off all attempts at sanity. Truly, the only thing more amusing than citizen journalism is citizen "scholarship."

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L

Oregon

February 3rd, 2011 1:00 am

My read is not that women are stigmatized for speaking out, but women have less of a compulsive need to be right and to show off their knowledge (d\*ck-waving we called it in graduate school, and still do). I'm a professor: and when I'm in class, in department meetings, reviewing books in my field, evaluating fellowship applications, whatever, I am never shy. I always say what I think, regardless of who else is in the room, and I'm willing to defend that I think. But my time and my effort and my expenditure of ego are too valuable to be wasting it in the blogosphere. There simply isn't a Wikipedia article I care enough about to engage in anonymous argument about. It's too bad, and depressing news that women aren't contributing nearly as much as men to the "knowledge" Wikipedia represents (and I consult it often because it's quick and handy), but not really a surprise.

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[Steve Sailer](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/3499740/activities.html)

San Diego, CA

February 3rd, 2011 1:12 am

Considering that almost nobody gets paid for Wikipedia, the most obvious thing that can be said about its existence from a gender point of view is that the human race owes a debt of gratitude to the male sex

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Erin

USA

February 3rd, 2011 1:15 am

Wait, we're considering "The Simpsons" to be "men's interest"? There's your trouble -- deciding that a topic belongs to one gender or the other.

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[Doug Terry](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/55954630/activities.html)

Maryland/DC area

February 3rd, 2011 1:18 am

Lemme see if I can figure out this argument. Women don't participate more because they don't want to be "negatively judged" for defending their stance? So, it is those negative judgments, those never ending, male propagated, potentially censorious arguments that discourage women? Hey dittle dittle, I think I get it. But I don't.  
  
I contribute, infrequently, to Wikipedia. I don't like the fact that I can work carefully constructing part of an article and anyone who happens to wander down the street can strike it, boom, before the electronic ink is dry. It could be a Nobel prize winner or a toad editing my article, I will never know.  
  
Evidently, there are a lot of people who consider certain subjects their personal property and they will defend their words, meager or otherwise, to the death. How dare you, mere electronic cyberspace dolt, think you can change what they have written! This is pure online democracy: you push, they shove and on till the end of time. Who has the time or energy to engage in that? Who is willing to have her words treated so lightly, indeed, viciously?  
  
It seems, from this opinion piece, that we have now reached the point, or stretched to the point, where attitudes against women can be used to explain anything: "Women may be negatively judged for speaking their mind in clear ways and defending their position." So, the author somehow divined that this could be discouraging participation. Well, yeah. So could the fact that today is Thursday or they had a flood in Australia two weeks ago. If we are to built a house on this spit of land, it had better be a very, very small and light one. the size of a bird's nest  
  
As far as I can tell, everyone in every phase of this life is subject to being judged negatively for almost anything they do. What is not judged negatively has not been noticed. So, unless the circumstances are perfectly aligned for their contribution, women will simply choose not to participate? If they are not welcomed warmly, they will stay home? Perhaps.  
  
I don't really care why women choose not to participate to an equal or greater degree than men. When someone comes up with an explanation that is tethered to reality, I will listen. I would like women to feel welcomed to contribute and, more importantly, I believe they should be willing to make an effort to create a common body of information and shared knowledge. In my own personal life, when I have missed an opportunity or failed to respond to its call, no one bothered to lament my fate or share a moment of sorrow for me. They didn't even wave goodbye. Life belongs to the swift and the willing and no amount of excuse making can change that basic reality.  
  
I would suggest simply that men are pushier than women as a matter of course. We seek to be noticed in every way possible, even if that means encountering negative results. To do the serious work of aiding in the creation and maintenance of an online body of knowledge, without pay, is in some ways strange on the face of it. One of the reasons I have contributed myself is that there are a lot of things I care about and my work as a journalist and student of history has shown me that vast inaccuracies are the norm, not the exception. History slips on many veils before it is ever written.  
  
Doug Terry  
[http://terryreport.com](http://terryreport.com" \t "_blank)

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[John](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/18215486/activities.html)

San Diego

February 3rd, 2011 1:28 am

Amazing, truly amazing. Apparently, there is a Wikipedia Gap. Who knew? And it's been discovered by....get ready...the Director of the Human-Computer Interaction Institute.  
  
I just have one question...why hasn't the the new partnership between the New York Times and The Onion been better publicized?

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jenn2010

brooklyn, ny

February 3rd, 2011 1:38 am

Wikipedia isn't well-designed or user-friendly. It's challenging to figure out how to contribute. The UX and interface are just not as simple as Yelp or Flickr.

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ekeizer4

Oregon

February 3rd, 2011 1:38 am

To use the examples in the Times article: A woman looks up friendship bracelets (really? Is that really something women are curious about?) or "Sex and the City" and finds a dearth of information. She shrugs and heads to another site to find what she's looking for. A man searches for details on some comic book -- and, finding little information, decides to add his own Wikipedia article.  
  
What makes women and men react differently to an absence of information? Why do men seemingly feel more comfortable jumping into the void to add their two cents? I suppose you could cite the same old cultural reasons -- men are raised to be more forward, or they are rewarded more for expressing their opinions. It could be that women have less time in their days to devote to Wikipedia. Even a woman without kids tends to fill her schedule to the brim with trips to the gym, friends, etc. Do men do the same? I'm not sure, but perhaps that could account for some of the discrepancy.  
  
On the whole, however, I really could care less if fewer women contribute to Wikipedia. I've never had an issue finding information I'm looking for, though I admit to never having looked up "Sex and the City." Besides, does the world need another website obsessing over Carrie's shoes and outfits? Sometimes I think Wikipedia is just fine the way it is.

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[Bob Garcia](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/3125003/activities.html)

Miami

February 3rd, 2011 1:43 am

I haven't created or edited any Wikipedia articles, but I've taken a close look at the "talk" and "history" for several topics of interest to me. I have the impression that editing takes a considerable commitment for immersion in the ways of Wikipedia and that editing discussions ("wars") shows a level of intensity that I typically associate with game players and programmers. One reason I've not created any articles is that I just don't want to spend the time endlessly jousting and defending them.  
  
My speculation is that the gender difference found among game players and programmers carries over into Wikipedia participation, that there are many, though certainly not all, Wikipedia editors who really enjoy edginess and conflict when armed with a keyboard and not in face-to-face interaction.

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Joseph Bianco

St. Louis

February 3rd, 2011 1:49 am

Let's get the government involved! Let's make laws! All the most advanced people do!

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Anon Male

San Francisco, CA

February 3rd, 2011 3:10 am

I find it easier to have honest, blunt, objective debates with men. Women tend more often to get emotional, i.e. personally offended, and to react emotionally and in ad hominem attacks with me.

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[Nostromo](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/5060254/activities.html)

Zurich

February 3rd, 2011 3:18 am

'The Simpsons' is an example of 'men's interests'???  
  
How many episodes of 'The Simpsons' has the writer actually watched? Among my acquaintances it seems to be equally popular with men and women.

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NB

Seattle

February 3rd, 2011 3:22 am

Women are busy. They have things to do.

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[19.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/a-culture-of-editing-wars?permid=19&offset=1#comment19)

[Mike Stearman](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/8824425/activities.html)

New York

February 3rd, 2011 4:05 am

The same proportion holds for any random bookshelf in a library, fiction or non-fiction, other than perhaps the children's section.  
Thus it has been for ages. Nobody really knows why.

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mpar

astoria

February 3rd, 2011 4:32 am

Men like to communicate and measure each other at arm's length, no touching, and Wikipedia, with its complex and new fangled rules and procedures, is great for that. Women share without needing also to mark territory, and so facebook, which is less arcane and territorial, skews mildly female in its demographics. All that work on facebook tends not to be remembered; like gossip, you can't retrieve it. Wikipedia is nothing if not a record of everything that ever happened there, a begat b begat c begat...

<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/a-culture-of-editing-wars>

**The Antisocial Factor**

**Updated** February 3, 2011, 12:19 PM

[**Anna North**](http://www.annanorth.net/) is a staff writer at [Jezebel](http://jezebel.com/). Her first novel, "America Pacifica," will be published in May.

The male majority on Wikipedia is actually a symptom of a larger issue: the creation of gendered spaces on the Internet. What used to be hailed as a new and radically equal world where we’d all be genderless, raceless beings (perhaps represented by awesome post-human avatars) has actually replicated many of the divisions present in stodgy old meatspace.

Female nerd culture has made big strides in the last decade, but we still have a ways to go.

Conservatives and liberals comment on their respective news sites, people of color often feel ostracized from majority-white forums, and men and women, too, seem to congregate in separate hubs. This isn’t always a problem – some have suggested, for instance, that women’s blogs function much as women’s consciousness-raising groups did in the 1970s, as safe spaces and incubators for feminist activism.

But when a site like Wikipedia, which is nominally a repository of all human knowledge, is revealed to be male-dominated, it makes sense to ask why.

According to Wikipedia itself, only a small percentage of users actually contribute or edit articles with any regularity. And according to Quantcast, the gender breakdown of Wikipedia’s visitors (at least at its English-language site) is close to equal – 52 percent men, 48 percent women. So women are reading Wikipedia. They just aren’t contributing to it.

Interestingly, the opposite is the case at Jezebel, where I work. Quantcast tells us 51 percent of our visitors are male, yet the majority of those who choose to leave comments identify as female. I’d wager that these aren’t the only sites where a large group of visitors remains somewhat invisible.

So why are aren’t female visitors more visible at Wikipedia? Why aren’t they editing articles at the same rate as men? I suspect that the ways certain activities become gendered on the Internet is as complex as it is in the real world, but one factor may be that solitarily editing an article on an online encyclopedia may be seen as antisocial.

Female dominance on social networking sites like Facebook has been touted of late, and it’s possible that the Internet spaces most acceptable for women to join are those that mirror social life. The Web isn’t exclusively the domain of male nerds (nor was it ever, really), but pop culture sometimes makes it seem that way – and some still judge women harshly for being intellectual or introverted (interestingly, the women who do edit Wikipedia are apparently more introverted than average). So it’s possible that women are drawn to spaces where they won’t feel they’re being nerdy.

One solution to this would be to make Wikipedia a more social place, but I’d also like to see both intellectualism and introversion become more acceptable for women too. Female nerd culture has made big strides in the last decade, and women have infiltrated many once-male online domains – but we still have a ways to go, and making Wikipedia more equal would be a big step in the right direction.

Topics: [Internet](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/topics/internet), [Technology](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/topics/technology), [Wikipedia](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/topics/wikipedia), [women](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/topics/women)

**'Open' Doesn't Include Everyone**

**Updated** February 3, 2011, 12:34 PM

[**Joseph M. Reagle**](http://reagle.org/joseph/)**,** a fellow at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, is the author of, ["Good Faith Collaboration: The Culture of Wikipedia."](http://reagle.org/joseph/2010/gfc/)

[Surveys](http://www.wikipediasurvey.org/docs/Wikipedia_Overview_15March2010-FINAL.pdf) indicate females are only a fraction of Wikipedia contributors. Can one discern a similar skew in Wikipedia's encyclopedic content, and what might explain the imbalance in contribution in the first place? These are both difficult questions to answer, but here are some tentative thoughts.

The ideology of freedom can be used to rationalize low female participation as simply a matter of personal preference.

While it is not possible to infer a causal link, Lauren Rhue of New York University and I have been [investigating](http://reagle.org/joseph/blog/social/wikipedia/wp-eb-gender-bias-coverage) if there is a bias against female representation in Wikipedia's biographies. In our research, we compare biographies at the English-language Wikipedia and online Encyclopaedia Britannica with respect to coverage, gender representation, and article length.

We find that Wikipedia provides significantly better coverage and longer articles, and that Wikipedia has more female biographies than Britannica in absolute terms. That is, your best chance at finding a given biography is at Wikipedia because it is just so big. However, when we looked specifically at missing biographies, we found Wikipedia articles on females are more likely to be missing than articles on males, relative to Britannica. That is, the ratio of missing females to males at Wikipedia was disproportionately higher. So there is some evidence for a skew in female representation.

Why are there so few female contributors to free culture projects like Wikipedia and free and open source software? In [a draft paper](http://reagle.org/joseph/blog/social/community/free-as-in-sexist-intro) I argue it is the otherwise commendable values and character of these communities which may be a factor.

First, a culture of hacker elitism can be unappealing to those unable or unwilling to hew to the stereotypical features of the hacker (i.e., a singular, narrow focus; argumentative style; and geek image). Also, the openness of such communities means that a minority of high-conflict members (including, for example, a misogynist or an Internet troll) can have a disproportionate effect on the tone and dynamics of the community.

Finally, the ideology and rhetoric of freedom and openness can then be used (a) to suppress concerns about inappropriate or offensive speech as "censorship" and (b) to rationalize low female participation as simply a matter of their personal preference and choice.

I think these communities are undergoing some difficult but necessary growing pains. As "locker-room" type behavior [is challenged](http://geekfeminism.org/) (e.g., inappropriate images in conference presentations and sexist jokes), I hope this will make way for more inclusiveness and [good faith collaboration](http://reagle.org/joseph/2010/gfc/) -- something which Wikipedia has many great examples of already.

Topics: [Internet](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/topics/internet), [Technology](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/topics/technology), [Wikipedia](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/topics/wikipedia), [women](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/topics/women)

[[ustine Cassell](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/a-culture-of-editing-wars)Previous Contributor **Editing Wars Behind the Scenes** Justine Cassell](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/a-culture-of-editing-wars) [[essamyn West](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/more-about-power-than-gender)Next Contributor **More About Power Than Gender** Jessamyn West](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/more-about-power-than-gender)

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[1.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone?permid=1&offset=1#comment1)

Ben J

New York, NY

February 3rd, 2011 2:19 am

The type of woman who would otherwise have the knowledge, motivation and skill to edit a Wikipedia page is too busy with her full-time job, kids, and social life to take the time to do that.

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[2.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone?permid=2&offset=1#comment2)

[EJD](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/60874553/activities.html)

London, UK

February 3rd, 2011 3:35 am

All three writers suggest that this gender disparity results from a clash between the "masculine" milieu of Wikipedia and the allegedly antipodal characteristics of women, but does any research ask a more materialist question?  
  
Wikipedia depends on unpaid labour. Has anyone questioned whether women (and which women?) have less free time to donate to such a voluntaristic project in the context of their other labours, both paid and unpaid? I don't know the answer to that question, but it's a bit disappointing that no one seems to have asked it, instead falling back on some predictable stereotypes which essentialise femininity as soft, cooperative, and agreeable.

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[3.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone?permid=3&offset=1#comment3)

[Sere](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/8066901/activities.html)

NYC

February 3rd, 2011 4:43 am

Oh I see. This SWPL is here to disgustingly celebrate the virtues of \*censorship\* so certain groups won't have hurt feelings.  
  
How nice.

[Recommend](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone) Recommended Recommended by 1 Reader [Report as inappropriate](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone) Reported

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Jesse

FL

February 3rd, 2011 6:26 am

You couldn't find a contributor to argue for the role of gender preferences? What kind of "debate" is this if you don't even address the most glaring explanation of this disparity?

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[5.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone?permid=5&offset=1#comment5)

[paisana](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/54279198/activities.html)

atlanta

February 3rd, 2011 6:43 am

I do not consider Wikipedia an authoritative source of knowledge--or even information. I am surprised that few women contribute because some of the entries read more like smear sheets or the old \*slam\* books from boarding school.If someone cites Wikipedia in a debate or discussion I usually consider my opponent's point invalid, and I would never accept a student paper that cited Wiki as a source.

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[6.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone?permid=6&offset=1#comment6)

jackthemaniac

sandiegoca

February 3rd, 2011 7:18 am

You could say simply that most women have better things to do, ie trying to control their environments in other ways.  
  
Don't you find it amazing that people will believe something because somebody else (that they don't know) says so? Why do you suppose that's so?

[Recommend](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone) Recommended Recommended by 1 Reader [Report as inappropriate](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone) Reported

[7.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone?permid=7&offset=1#comment7)

Bob

PA

February 3rd, 2011 7:34 am

Oh I see...contributing to Wikipedia is "unappealing" to women, so therefore it's Wikipedia's fault. We have to figure out how to change it and the culture around it to make it more appealing and therefore how do get more women interested in be involved.  
  
Changing diapers is unappealing to men. We never ask how we can fix it or it's culture.  
  
We just blame men for being ininvolved parents.  
  
Ladies, if there are not enough bios on women or details you want to see added....  
  
GUESS WHAT...  
  
There is LITERALLY NOTHING stopping you. You have a computer, I know that for a fact...USE it.  
  
Stop blaming men. Stop blaming society. Stop blaming the patriarchy.  
  
The ONLY reason you are not editing Wikipedia is because you have chosen not to do it.

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[8.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone?permid=8&offset=1#comment8)

[synky](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/25756074/activities.html)

Boston

February 3rd, 2011 7:34 am

Yawn, how bland. An inventory of what he's been doing recently, some statistics, and LOTS of repetition. This 'debate' can be summed up in about two sentences without the fancy discerning words. Seriously, can't the NYTimes find someone from Harvard with an actual opinion?

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[9.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone?permid=9&offset=1#comment9)

Bob

PA

February 3rd, 2011 7:45 am

Ask this question another way...  
  
Why is the burden of editing Wikipedia placed on men? Why are women not meeting their responsibilities?

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Bob

PA

February 3rd, 2011 7:55 am

If women really, truly need help or encouragement to accomplish something that has absolutely NO barriers to it...I will never call them equal again.  
  
This is the most pathetic thing I have ever read.  
  
There is nothing stopping women from editing Wikipedia. Not one thing.

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Bob

PA

February 3rd, 2011 8:12 am

I think I'm officially a misogynist now.  
  
I never knew women were this helpless and weak.  
  
Margolis, who cares about air bags? Are those air bags preventing women from editing Wiki?  
  
I didn't think so.

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[12.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone?permid=12&offset=1#comment12)

[Charlotte](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/23019448/activities.html)

Florence, MA

February 3rd, 2011 8:19 am

I think this is a good and hopeful assessment.

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Mary

DC

February 3rd, 2011 8:52 am

Well, a lot of internet traffic has always been men and boys with too much time on their hands! For a lot of guys, Wikipedia is proto-information porn. When I taught college, it was the guys who invariably didn't know where the library was on campus (as well as in the city). I don't know any females for whom Wikipedia is a go-to resource of anything more than banal surface skimming or a cherry-picked factoid here and there, and even then certainly not as a research tool. That dynamic is likely to continue considering how many more women than men are pouring into higher education ... and graduating with sharper skills sets beyond video games and peacock tail puffery. What Wikipedia has going for it is speed and access, not accuracy or scholarship. Plus, there are simply a growing number of better internet sources of information. Those with jobs don't have time to fiddle into the night, waging internecine 'who's on first' pillow fights over pop culture arcana.

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[j-No](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/182338/activities.html)

NYC

February 3rd, 2011 8:46 am

The locker-room culture of geeky male hacker elitism and preponderance of juvenalia on Wikipedia is readily apparent to anyone who has spent much time there. An example is the one area where there is a surplus of female bios: playmates, porn stars, and swimsuit models. [http://en.wikipedia.org...](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playboy_Playmate" \t "_blank) even provides links to bios for dozens of nude models, yet Wikipedia's "democratic" committees (sometimes as few as three people - generally young men) routinely reject as "not significant" bios of artists, political activists, and scientists, as those are apparently not fields of great interest to them. This is what comes from lack of transparency (the degree of anonymity of Wikipedia editors rivals the CIA's) and lack of serious peer review.

[Recommend](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone) Recommended Recommended by 15 Readers [Report as inappropriate](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone) Reported

[15.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone?permid=15&offset=1#comment15)

[Zeamays](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/11463067/activities.html)

Wikipedia

February 3rd, 2011 9:18 am

I don't agree with the assertion that a lack of female Wikipedia editors is responsible for the lack/length of articles on women and issues of interest of women. I am a male and I have written several biographies of illustrious females from scratch and edited others to add content.  
  
Anyone who finds a red-highlighted link or search result can create a new article on that topic. Nothing will stop you, go ahead! If the article is not on a contentious topic, your words will likely endure for a while.  
  
Finally, I don't see any evidence of the "misogynist" attitude cited by Reagle here. Many editors have their prejudices, but I haven't seen that one.

[Recommend](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone) Recommended Recommended by 8 Readers [Report as inappropriate](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone) Reported

[16.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone?permid=16&offset=1#comment16)

[GiGi](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/75106/activities.html)

Montana

February 3rd, 2011 9:56 am

There could be another dynamic. Ever listen to call in radio shows? My unscientific observation is that by far the greater number of callers are men, and not just right-wing on AM radio. It's the same on NPR programs. There's a certain amount of risk involved in calling in and men may be more willing to take it.

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[17.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone?permid=17&offset=1#comment17)

[Paul CometX NYC](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/21650452/activities.html)

new york

February 3rd, 2011 11:04 am

Why don't women contribute more to Wikipedia? Could it be something as simple as the fact that there are only so many hours in a day, and one has to make choices. I'd venture to say that the average woman - single or married - has more to do in a given day than an average man, and updating Facebook ranks higher than researching and contributing to Wikipedia. There are things that men like to do that women don't and vice versa; perhaps Wikipedia is a guy thing, like collecting baseball cards or playing video games.

[Recommend](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone) Recommended Recommended by 3 Readers [Report as inappropriate](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone) Reported

[18.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone?permid=18&offset=1#comment18)

Charlie D

Phoenix, AZ

February 3rd, 2011 10:53 am

Why do fewer women contribute to this site than men? What are the ages of the men that contribute? What are the political leanings of these men? What is their sexual orientation? Do they have hair, beards, and mustaches; or are they balding? Does it really matter?  
  
What is the point here? Do women feel excluded as you claim or don’t they feel the need to contribute? I have found personally that women are much less inclined to contribute to technical questions than men. Yes, there are brilliant women in science and most men welcome their input. Yes, there are some really stupid men in science, and we all dread their input.  
  
Why turn this into a feminist agenda item rather than admitting that this is possibly an area where women just don’t feel the need? Is it just possible that men need more affirmation than women? Could it be that men are more insecure and need to tell the world what we know…constantly? Is it just possible that this raises the question of your female advantages in these areas and more? Is that fair?  
  
I think when we stop looking for differences between us we’ll see that everyone regardless of gender can contribute as they feel and to their strengths. Then we can start supporting rather than competing with each other.

**More About Power Than Gender**

**Updated** February 3, 2011, 12:34 PM

[**Jessamyn West**](http://www.jessamyn.info/) is a community manager at [MetaFilter.com](http://www.metafilter.com/user/292) and has been writing about technology, librarianship and the Internet at [librarian.net](http://www.librarian.net/) since 1999. She edits Wikipedia under her real name.

People with neutral handles online are seen as male, similar to the “generic” male pronoun in English. Since there’s no such thing as a gender-neutral person, there’s no such thing as a gender-neutral Wikipedia editor. What we’re really asking is whether the gender differential matters substantively and if so, how.

With crowdsourcing, some voices are more tacitly and overtly accepted than others.

If we decide it matters, and I think it does, we can’t just stop with gender on Wikipedia but we need to examine what it means to be an authoritative reference: how sources for the Oxford English Dictionary have historically been by white male authors; how dictionary examples reinforce sexist assumptions; how very few non-European sources are used for “world” history texts. Wikipedia reflects a trend that’s existed in reference works for centuries. Other sites are primarily about sharing, but this is not Wikipedia’s goal.

If altering the gender balance matters, then we have to not just promote this idea, but be prepared to enforce social norms of equity and diversity -- not just wait for a beautiful future where balance somehow exists -- and we have to learn to deal gracefully with the backlash. It is a discussion more about power than gender.

Crowdsourcing is not democratic. Crowds are still made of people, and some voices are more tacitly and overtly accepted than others. What’s relevant and laudable is that the Wikimedia Foundation decided they care. At [MetaFilter](http://www.metafilter.com/) we take a strong affirmative stance on gender equity. We solicit female members intentionally. We set a tone, often deleting rape jokes, racist comments, or aggressive harassment of other members. This results in some predictable backlash and we accept that.

We do this because we have the ability to not just set guidelines, but also enforce them so that we can create a place where different types of people feel comfortable interacting. People see a female moderator and they think “Maybe my views are understood or represented here.” I see it as a form of outreach, some active, some passive.

There’s a very real difference between online and offline communities. In an online community someone always has the root password, giving them a level of power and responsibility. At the public library, someone has the keys to the building, but they’ve been given that authority by the public. I’m a free speech defender in the public sphere but I believe it is acceptable to set guidelines in private spaces if you have goals beyond just being a free speech bastion.

Topics: [Internet](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/topics/internet), [Technology](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/topics/technology), [Wikipedia](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/topics/wikipedia), [women](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/topics/women)

[[oseph M. Reagle](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone)Previous Contributor **'Open' Doesn't Include Everyone** Joseph M. Reagle](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/open-doesnt-include-everyone) [[ane Margolis](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/hearing-womens-voices)Next Contributor **Hearing Women's Voices** Jane Margolis](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/hearing-womens-voices)

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[Steve Sailer](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/3499740/activities.html)

San Diego, CA

February 3rd, 2011 12:59 am

So Guys create Wikipedia for free---and that's a problem??  
  
I would imagine that if less than 15% of the contributors are women, then much less than 15% of the work is done by women.  
  
Considering that almost nobody gets paid for Wikipedia, the most obvious thing that can be said about its existence from a gender point of view is that the human race owes a debt of gratitude to the male sex.  
  
I note that the Mexican Simpson's character Bumblebee Man only gets a subarticle on Wikipedia, and I'm much more interested in Bumblebee Man than in Mexican feminist writers, so, guys, get back to work!  
  
To the extent that not having more articles about Mexican feminist writers is a problem, it's a problem caused not by evil misogynists, but by women (in particular, by Mexican women), who are less likely than men (especially non-Mexican men) to see the point (assuming there is one) in working for free to expand access to information for people they don't know. But blaming any problem, even one as exiguous as women not contributing much unpaid labor to Wikipedia, on women is a no-no, so the fault must lie with "misogynists."

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MJA

Philadelphia

February 3rd, 2011 3:54 am

Gender-neutral people exist.

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[Sere](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/8066901/activities.html)

NYC

February 3rd, 2011 4:45 am

More not-very-sweet-smelling defense of censorship. As Flaubert would have it: how surprising!

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[panoptic6](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/46622939/activities.html)

New York, NY and New Haven, CT

February 3rd, 2011 5:47 am

More trying to control under the guise of equality. Cut it out. I am a woman. I'm more concerned with knowledge than gender politics. You actually make it harder for real living and breathing women vs the theoretical ones you support. Women need to man up, so to speak. And believe me, I'm 58, been around this game now for almost two generations, and see that it is a sum total losing game, this trying to morph the playing field to suit us. Rather teach girls from school age up to own their own, individual ability than force a false equality. I've no doubt there are as many smart females out there as males when it comes to this stuff. But I don't need another round of control to prove it.

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[AG](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/37654436/activities.html)

CT

February 3rd, 2011 7:02 am

Wikipedia is one more 'football field' on which men can compete to outdo one another. Women aren't interested in this and having to defend one's knowledge is, instead, tiresome. Males are authoritarian by nature so the Wikipedia format is the perfect place for them to tell the world what they 'know to be so', even if it ain't. It's a challenge and they love it!

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jomama

Toronto

February 3rd, 2011 7:37 am

As a Canadian who's generally proud of our (Canadian) quasi-socialist system, I have to say that though this kind of debate is worthy, I find the following bit: "be prepared to enforce social norms of equity and diversity" to be rather insulting and sinister.  
  
It says something about women (or any group) who feel the only way they can reach 'equality' is to enforce it by law or some other authoritarian means.  
  
The fact that you so conveniently ignore is that the Internet is a free and open society (built mostly MEN) that enabled Wikipedia in the first place. And you, in your non-experience as a writer (talk is cheap), want to lay down your almighty authoritarian 'social justice' and infringe upon the very open expression that allowed Wikipedia to flourish.  
  
So will men then have to go and create a new world for you to critique and destroy?  
  
Or how about: encourage women to participate in such things as Wikipedia contributions. If they don't IT'S YOUR GENDERS FAULT. Nobody else's.

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[Charlotte](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/23019448/activities.html)

Florence, MA

February 3rd, 2011 8:16 am

I think though you see a lot of male religious figures, women have a more inherent sense that the world is mystical, and we understand that scientific fact is fluid(and a brainier male the same, given 93% of the universe is dark matter). Buddhists say not to agonize what we don't know, and often women can be very capable in positions of leadership because our "tend and befriend" helps to mediate opinions and facilitate implementation of new ideas. Myself, I really do appreciate being able to find the facts so very much, but have never had a good memory for them unless they are related by a compelling theme, feeling or idea or personalities(e.g., FDR and Churchill). But the idea of going on Wikipedia to correct every misstatement about, e.g., Bill Clinton or Barack Obama just feels mentally exhausting. A very smart lawyer friend of mine has urged me to. I'm flattered. Maybe.

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JerryMcT

Fairfield, CT

February 3rd, 2011 8:33 am

This might sound boorish and sexist and unscientific, but maybe the same dynamic is at work here that reveals that in a classroom of boys and girls the boys will more aggressively raise their hands to show off their knowledge, thus intimidating the girls. Power and ego and self-promotion have to play a part in this, and we men are experts at this, often using our elbows to be heard and win the argument, a tactic that turns many women off. This male quest for dominance and attention may be what's affecting Wikipedia. And seems to derive from the intrinsic nature of our gender. The answer? They say that girls thrive in an all-girls classroom. It would be interesting to see how a female-dominated online encyclopedia would compare to Wikipedia. My guess is, the process would be a lot more civil, and the content a lot less sanctimonious.

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[TimothyBarrus](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/58923560/activities.html)

Paris

February 3rd, 2011 9:17 am

My own Wikipedia entry is a mishmashmess of lies, innuendo, gotcha snark, political correctness, political incorrectness, guess-work, assumption, fact-checking with blogs (as we all know blogs are never opinionated), literary agendas, spit, spite, meanness, and deliberately maintained falsehoods perpetrated by people driven with a vile need to punish. They can't even get where I live right. They CHERRY-PICK, and construct their so-called facts in such a carefully maligned way so that the twisted picture they have painted is maintained only by pieces of a puzzle they desire to be seen. They conveniently ignore three-quarters of the work I do, they have not read a single one of the books I have written; which they claim to be experts on, and they quite simply have no idea what they are talking about because they are intransigent about maintaining a fiction they proclaim is real. They are beneath contempt. They are not editors. They are a mob throwing stones. They conveniently TOTALLY LOCK DOWN AND PROHIBIT any correction WHATSOEVER. The thing is patently absurd. The only thing they're expert at is pure rubbish. They even go after me on Facebook (I am not even on Facebook) where anytime anyone in a thousand countries writes my name, they quickly display it on a Tim Barrus Wikipedia page that was designed to humiliate me which is as juvenile and it is laughable. There are many people in the world with my name. I assume some of them are on Facebook. My apologies to them. Wikipedia is a snotty little group of spoiled brats.

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[Kurt](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/55563058/activities.html)

NY

February 3rd, 2011 9:52 am

You've said "People see a female moderator and they think 'Maybe my views are understood or represented here.'", I guess as opposed to seeing a male moderator and feeling threatened or excluded? Who's being sexist now?

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[Gary](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/57595872/activities.html)

Virginia

February 3rd, 2011 10:15 am

So you select female participants intentionally! Wikipedia is free for anyone to come and edit. I'm an admin on Wikipedia, casual acquaintances prove to be quite familiar with it. I've never heard of Meta Filter. How's that working out for you?

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[12.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/more-about-power-than-gender?permid=12&offset=1#comment12)

Elisa Waggoner

Orange, CA

February 3rd, 2011 10:52 am

The commenters seem to agree that, by various measures, there is a gender gap in Wikipedia and that it is important that multiple voices and topics be contributed.  
  
Wikipedia requires a fact based rather than opinion based approach, and suggests that facts be based on sources. That may sound reasonable and obvious, but suppose I would like to write about the experiences and changing roles of housewives in Japan. In some English scholarship, they are barely mentioned as asides with relation to their career oriented husbands, whose own norms and experiences are more documented. Sometimes housewives in Japan are mentioned in English with respect to what they are not, regarding political office, corporate executive positions, and the positional power structures that we use as social reference points. However, due to economic factors, many work part-time, and they have not just a dominant position within the family structure, but interesting effects on the culture and a strong role within the society. The research probably exists in Japanese, but I cannot easily quantify the effects they have on consumer culture and design, the way their parenting choices shape culture, and nor can I use my memories of meeting many of them to explore their roles and worldviews. It would not make sense for me to try to write a fact based article about them, because what I am trying to express is that even writing which percentage of them work, how many hours, and in which fields, or which percentage of them control the family finances, or how many hours they spend with their children vs. with their husbands or their friends, or shopping/cooking/cleaning, et cetera, would not express the main point about their role, somewhat idealized but quite real, in social cohesion and in Japanese norms/values. What we consider scholarship has its own traditional biases about the nature of power, as Jessamyn West suggests -- and a focus that can overlook a lot of meaningful experiences. Currently, a better forum than Wikipedia in encouraging these voices would be one in which people could just share their experiences and opinions, especially in person.  
  
For the record, I love the Oxford English Dictionary, and think that it is of great quality even if there is the issue of whose sources traditionally formed the basis of its definitions. It is still fairly comprehensive and good at expressing nuances, which is rare. Wikipedia is also a valuable resource, and I read it often. I appreciate the contributors and the span of knowledge that is there, even if some topics are easier to address well per Wikipedia's rules, than others.

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Big John

North Carolina

February 3rd, 2011 11:05 am

Please come on ladies, there are more women working in the US then men. There are more women graduating from college then men and women have taken over complete industries such as banking, real estate and many more. You are allowed in any type of job such as police, fire and even combat in the service. You have a better chance of getting a good job than a man and everyone who has applied for work knows this. Once you are in a position of authority you only hire other women and everyone knows that as well. I would say you have came a long, long way, so enjoy it and quit complaining.

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[RC](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/60865227/activities.html)

Pompano Beach FL

February 3rd, 2011 10:40 am

Ms. West states...  
  
“we need to examine what it means to be an authoritative reference: how sources for the Oxford English Dictionary have historically been by white male authors”  
  
I don’t see that the sources or their "authoritative" credentials need examination. The results of an examination are in the premise and proposition.  
  
It’s the Oxford “English” Dictionary. First proposed and commissioned as review of language from “Anglo Saxon” times, beginning in the 12th century. It was commissioned in 1857, by the Philological Society of London… by English men, who were white. It's rather ludicrous to contemplate an English dictionary being compiled by anyone else, unless a foreign scholar highly proficient in the language, and with the temperament to work upon its compilation. Such was the case in succeeding decades also.  
  
It, was a daunting task… retrospectively. And has been an ongoing work in progress, publishing since then fascicles, with the work bring finally completed in April 1928 when the English New Dictionary was produced… 8 years after women’s right to vote was made law.  
  
It began one hundred and fifty four years ago. During the Victorian Era. There weren’t very many female scholars at that time in England… or anywhere. Looking at the cultures of various countries now, in 2011, tens of millions of women aren’t allowed to attend schools by the patriarchal and repressive current mindsets. Being that it’s an “English” dictionary, proposed and commissioned during the Victorian Era by white English men, wouldn’t it be logical to conclude that white English men would make up the preponderance of it’s contributors and authors?  
  
I don’t have any statistics at hand, but I’d venture that over the last 30 or so years, the staff of the OED includes women whose work and contributions were represented in the 1989 edition…and will be represented in the next edition, whenever that may be.  
  
Regarding Wiki. I feel certain that there is no intentional gender bias nor sexism. Many factors need to be considered… it could be as simple as there are significantly higher numbers of males who submit. I know that it is of no consequence to me what the gender of a contributor is. I care only about the information, and the corroborative reference material provided.  
  
Sometimes the gender trump card is played on an empty table with no game taking place at all.

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dr.lapin

San Francisco

February 3rd, 2011 11:05 am

I agree with the argument of this piece, so please take my response as a relatively minor comment. You write, "there’s no such thing as a gender-neutral person," but that's not quite right. There have always been intersexed babies whose gender-specific nature was created by a decision made by adults raised in a gendered and sexist culture. And now there is a legally recognized non-gendered person. See, e.g. the following link:  
  
[http://www.smh.com](http://www.smh.com" \t "_blank).au/nsw/sexless-in-the-city-a-gender-revolution-20100311-q1l2.html

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[16.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/more-about-power-than-gender?permid=16&offset=1#comment16)

[Michael Solana](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/58110731/activities.html)

New York, NY

February 3rd, 2011 11:06 am

So what you want to do is find a way to tamper with the already completely-open Wikipedia in order to enforce your opinion (re: gender). Congratulations, you've just subverted a purely egalitarian system in the name of egalitarianism.

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[Tinkdnuos](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/48849049/activities.html)

Philadelphia

February 3rd, 2011 12:17 pm

My, my. Lots of defensive know-it-all men posting here. Get over yourselves, guys.

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[18.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/more-about-power-than-gender?permid=18&offset=1#comment18)

Chris

Queens

February 3rd, 2011 12:38 pm

@TimothyBarrus, I am not familiar with your case, but the article is nicely cited with reliable sources. There is only one blog post cited, which is used to reference the opinion of the (notable) author of that blog. Unfortunately for you, you are best known for the coverage of your alleged hoax, and the article reflects that.

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[19.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/more-about-power-than-gender?permid=19&offset=1#comment19)

Chris

Queens

February 3rd, 2011 1:00 pm

@Elisa, Wikipedia is not a place to publish original research. If you are interested in the topic and there really is no documented information about it, you can conduct your own research and publish it in a journal or other scholarly outlet. And frankly, just because it isn't easy to quantify those effects does not mean that it can't be done: that is the role of the social scientist. There is nothing biased, traditionally or otherwise, in this type of rigorous scholarship.

[Recommend](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/more-about-power-than-gender) Recommended Recommended by 1 Reader [Report as inappropriate](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/more-about-power-than-gender) Reported

[20.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/more-about-power-than-gender?permid=20&offset=1#comment20)

[Sam Adams](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/23575610/activities.html)

Branford CT

February 3rd, 2011 1:37 pm

No one has commented upon a potential 'elephant in the room' which is how men's and women's brains might be 'hard-wired.' I've read that there is some evidence that TV screens, computer screens, etc. cause neurons in men's brains to fire differently than neurons in women's brains....perhaps men spend more time in front of these screens than women as a resu

**A Difference of Communication Styles**

**Updated** February 3, 2011, 04:58 PM

[**Susan C. Herring**](http://www.slis.indiana.edu/faculty/herring/) is a professor of information science and linguistics at Indiana University. She is co-editor of "The Multilingual Internet: Language, Culture, and Communication Online."

I was not surprised to read that 87 percent of contributors to Wikipedia are men. I’ve been researching gender dynamics in Internet communication for 20 years, starting with mailing lists back before there was even a World Wide Web, and the Wikipedia gender imbalance is consistent with observations from my research, dating back to [my very first study](http://ella.slis.indiana.edu/%7Eherring/participation.1992.pdf) on the topic in 1992.

In that study, I investigated the reasons for women’s low rate of participation in an online discussion list for academic linguists. Linguistics is a field in which more than 50 percent of the Ph.D.s are earned by women, and women made up close to 40 percent of the subscribers to this particular list. The fact that they contributed less than 15 percent of the content to the discussions, even on topics of broad general interest to professional linguists, seemed anomalous. Then — like now — claims proliferated about the inherently democratic nature of online communication.

In online academic discussion forums, women posted more factual messages than men, but men tended to assert their opinions as “facts.”

I conducted an online survey of members of the list, asking them if they posted messages to the list, and if not, why not? I thought that there might be several reasons why women contributed less: they were too busy (e.g., with teaching or family responsibilities); they were less interested than men in the topics of discussion; or they were intimidated by the tone of the discourse on the list, which was often contentious. The results showed that:

— Fewer women than men said they were too busy.

— Far fewer women than men said they weren’t interested in the topics of discussion.

Both men and women said their main reason for not participating was because they were intimidated by the tone of the discussions, though women gave this reason more often than men did. Women were also more negative about the tone of the list. Whereas men tended to say that they found the “slings and arrows” that list members posted “entertaining” (as long as they weren’t directed at them), women reported that the antagonistic exchanges made them want to unsubscribe from the list. One women said it made her want to drop out of the field of linguistics altogether.

Wikipedia, like the linguist list, is a site where discourse is not infrequently contentious. On ‘talk’ pages, where the process of article creation is hashed out, one’s contributions are often challenged, and some contributors, anonymous and otherwise, use rude and haranguing language. Such environments are — if not outright intimidating — unappealing to many women.

The similarities go beyond contentiousness. Both Wikipedia and the linguist list are knowledge focused, and it’s a popular stereotype that men are believed to know more “hard facts,” while women are better at nurturing and getting along with people. I evaluated this stereotype in [another study](http://ella.slis.indiana.edu/%7Eherring/2variants.1996.pdf), in which I found that women in online academic discussion forums actually posted somewhat more factual messages than men.

However, men tended to assert their opinions as “facts,” whereas women tended to phrase their informative messages as suggestions, offers, and other non-assertive acts. In other words, the gender difference was in their communication styles, not in the actual informativeness of their contributions.

Wikipedia, however, doesn’t allow for the non-assertive style preferred by many women. Rather, it enforces a “neutral point of view” policy, which favors a more masculine style of communication — just the facts, ma’am. And of course the creation and editing of knowledge repositories, as evidenced in the tradition of print encyclopedias, has always been dominated by men.

The encyclopedic nature of Wikipedia, combined with its rigid adherence to a “neutral” point of view, are factors that might make women less inclined to contribute.

Finally, Wikipedia, like most multi-participant online environments, is public. Men traditionally populate the public domain, whether it be in politics, religion, or on the Internet. They tend to feel a greater sense of entitlement to occupy public space. This is reflected in [my finding](http://ella.slis.indiana.edu/%7Eherring/gender.power.pdf) that men regularly post longer messages to online discussion forums than women do, and they rarely apologize for message length, even when they go on for 20 screens, whereas women apologize even for short messages. Some women may lack the confidence to contribute to Wikipedia or feel that it would be presumptuous of them to do so.

Yet plenty of women participate in public Internet communication. Many women blog, for example, and more than half of users of social network sites are female. It is no coincidence, I think, that both those technologies have a feature that Wikipedia and discussion forums have traditionally lacked: the ability to control the communication.   
  
Bloggers can delete comments or disallow commenting altogether. The “walled garden” model on which Facebook is based allows women (and men) to choose who can read and contribute; flamers and harassers can be filtered out. There, as nowhere previously online, women share information, but they also socialize and support one another.

Mark Zuckerberg, the creator of Facebook, recently declared that the future of knowledge sharing on the Internet is social recommendation — people will trust information more if someone they know and like is associated with it. If this is so, the Wikipedia model of neutral facts concentrated in a single site may some day be superseded by knowledge-sharing environments with women as the primary contributors.

But I’m not holding my breath.

Topics: [Internet](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/topics/internet), [Technology](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/topics/technology), [Wikipedia](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/topics/wikipedia), [women](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/topics/women)

[[erri Oda](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/trolls-and-other-nuisances)Previous Contributor **Trolls and Other Nuisances** Terri Oda](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/trolls-and-other-nuisances) [[nna North](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/the-antisocial-factor)Next Contributor **The Antisocial Factor** Anna North](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/the-antisocial-factor)

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[rohit](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/13120392/activities.html)

New York

February 3rd, 2011 12:03 pm

Well, we have all kinds of problems. There is the deficit, there is the health insurance problem, there is China, and there is Egypt.  
  
But I think Obama should put aside all of them, RIGHT NOW, and work on this much more urgent problem of Wikipedia disparity. After all, he has a wife and two daughters, why are they not doing their part? What about Hillary? Has SHE created or edited any Wikipedia entries? If not, should she stay as Secretary of State?  
  
Seriously, there seems to be an enormous amout of research showing that men and women are different and have different communication styles. But some people seem unable to live with the fact that men and women are different. They assume that any perceived difference is a nefarious plot by religious maniacs or extreme right wingers.  
  
When my son was a high school student, he was obsessed with videogames and he was the champion at a number of viedo game parlors in our little town. His sister never played these games.  
Perhaps we should complain about this "disparity".  
  
But the result? She got into every school to which she applied. He did not.

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[Rich](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/12569787/activities.html)

Pennsylvania

February 3rd, 2011 12:05 pm

I think it's generally true that women are less motivated to contribute to Wiki...for a number of reasons...technical: learning how the site functions; objectivity and neutrality: related to reference scholarship; and perhaps reasons relating to self confidence. I too have had difficulty in learning the technical side. In one instance, I worked to revise the Ginger Rogers entry, which had enough incorrect objective sounding information, that it distorted the whole piece.  
  
I added some quotes that clearly demonstrated how Astaire was highly aware of how much Rogers had contributed to their mutual success...and I deleted some quotes from completely unqualified people in dance...like Pauline Kael...that were weighted equally, with highly qualified experts like Croce, Mueller, and Hyam. I also deleted some specious, and meaningless, references alleging right-wing activities, which made her look like a member of the John Birch Society..instead of the big-tent Republican she was. It's too bad women don't contribute enough, because there's a lot that needs to be corrected. Objective sounding don't always translate to objective in reality. In fact, such superficial, official sounding, distortion got me mad. Enough of my changes remain today to give a truer picture of the lady.

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[kccm](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/58271578/activities.html)

Toronto

February 3rd, 2011 12:12 pm

I agree with some of your assertions about different 'styles' of communication (full disclosure - I am a male blogger and I don't find the social aspects of Facebook particularly attractive.) However, the internet is a "knowledge-sharing environment" overall and I believe, with the popularity of frameworks such as Facebook "women [are becoming] the primary contributors."  
Implications - our current scientific method depends on coming up with theories or assertions, testing those assertions, then publishing the results for scrutiny, comment and criticism. Some of the greatest failures of that approach have been due to inadequate scrutiny and criticism of assertions and test results by overly 'friendly' (or arguably incompetent) communities of peers.  
I assert that the internet, through harnessing humanity's 'cognitive surplus' will make increasingly valuable contributions to our knowledge base, as well as our greater sense of social community. However, to be effective, in addition to supportive 'walled garden' social communities like Facebook the internet will need areas of more contentious debate like Wikipedia.  
If, through nature or nurture, men are more drawn to higher-profile and more contentious communities (sounds like I am doing an ad for on-line Halo gaming!), so be it, and that is not necessarily a 'bad thing.'  
...And I make no apologies either for my assertions or the length of my post...

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[Rick A](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/40928378/activities.html)

New Smyrna Beach, FL

February 3rd, 2011 12:37 pm

Could it be that women just don't believe anything that comes out of a man's mouth?

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[Eric](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/45164870/activities.html)

Wisconsin

February 3rd, 2011 12:49 pm

As some one who has contributed to Wikipedia I guess I fit the mold (a male). I like the style of Wikipedia and don't think that should change. I ask why should everything have to be 50-50? Why can't there be sites that fit the interests of one group versus another. If we all become the same people with the same interests and the same way of doing things, this would be one boring uncreative world.

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[6.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/communication-styles-make-a-difference?permid=6&offset=1#comment6)

John Weaver

Crawley, England

February 3rd, 2011 12:52 pm

The essence of scientific methodology is to assert your thesis in the public domain and then defend it against reasoned challenge. If you lose the argument, you were wrong and must change your position.  
  
If certain members of the community cannot face this process, they should probably be doing something else.

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[jojojo43](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/56611858/activities.html)

Bronx, NY

February 3rd, 2011 12:57 pm

And if a woman is walking down the street and the light turns red so she can't cross, then we somehow have to fix that "problem" too.

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[Mike](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/45956068/activities.html)

Texas

February 3rd, 2011 1:01 pm

Some good points here, from which we may derive a plan of action.  
  
'Wikipedia, however, doesn’t allow for the non-assertive style preferred by many women. Rather, it enforces a “neutral point of view” policy, which favors a more masculine style of communication — just the facts, ma’am.'  
  
-------The site's criteria should be reformed so that feelings of consensus are equally valued, & not segregated, creating a diverse blend. Otherwise, such offerings can easily be discerned from 'just the facts' & pruned out by insensitive readers.  
  
'However, men tended to assert their opinions as 'facts,' whereas women tended to phrase their informative messages as suggestions, offers, and other non-assertive acts.'  
  
------Previously I would have thought a '“neutral point of view”' is synonymous with 'suggestions, offers, and other non-assertive acts,' but your article has convinced me otherwise. Maybe consensus isn't so difficult to attain!  
  
'They tend to feel a greater sense of entitlement to occupy public space. This is reflected in my finding that men regularly post longer messages to online discussion forums than women do, and they rarely apologize for message length, even when they go on for 20 screens, whereas women apologize even for short messages'  
  
------When men are allowed to ramble on so long about the new dorkulator they've invented, it amounts to capitalism of achievement. Surely there are women of literary bearing who can trim down a long article about thorium or whatever, replacing the tedious bits with more graceful turns of phrase to set the mood? Why not start on this today?  
  
'Yet plenty of women participate in public Internet communication. Many women blog, for example, and more than half of users of social network sites are female. It is no coincidence, I think, that both those technologies have a feature that Wikipedia and discussion forums have traditionally lacked: the ability to control the communication. Bloggers can delete comments or disallow commenting altogether.'  
  
--------Wikipedia already has administrative & lock-down functions, but apparently they aren't used as much as they should be. With greater participation from the feminist blogosphere, the available tools can be applied more actively toward building a less-threatening community. Another writer on this series noted that she routinely deletes sexist remarks on her blog - just think of all the sexist material on Wikipedia waiting to be deleted. Time's a-wastin', let's get to it.  
  
'the Wikipedia model of neutral facts concentrated in a single site may some day be superseded by knowledge-sharing environments with women as the primary contributors.'  
  
To equality!

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[Doug](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/22777841/activities.html)

Kansas City

February 3rd, 2011 1:03 pm

The simplest explanation is: women and men are different. The most elaborate explanation is: this is yet another conspiracy perpetrated by men. I believe the former is true because Wikipedia was always open and without agenda from the very outset.

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[MCR](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/34627908/activities.html)

Katonah NY

February 3rd, 2011 1:15 pm

Women appear to be more intelligent than men and so much on Wiki is incorrect...why would they want to comment?

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[11.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/communication-styles-make-a-difference?permid=11&offset=1#comment11)

[Drill-Baby-Drill Drill Team](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/286543/activities.html)

Mojave

February 3rd, 2011 1:17 pm

If you look at published books, men dominate authorship approaching the Wikipedia authorship ratios of 80% Male: 20% Female. IF you remove the Harlequin Romance Fiction and the Women's and Gender Studies Categories, Cookbooks and Parenting Books THEN publishing knowledge of the entire spectrum of information probably exceeds 90% male authorship.  
  
Part of the reason is book knowledge has been accumulating for centuries--or millennium if you count Chinese society-- and women have only been recent arrivals. Most Female Literacy has only been in the last Century.  
  
But Wikipedia is only a decade old. Women have never been discriminated from auto-publishing. Women have more education degrees. Women can multitask better. Women have a more focused and practical mind. Women type faster.  
  
Why is there a Wiki-Gender Gap? Though overall women may be more competent than the average male, I think EXPERTISE is more of a male trait.  
  
I would like to see Gender Data on Blog Posters...I think women may be more likely to be silently readers than to post on the internet. Men are more opinionated--IMHO.

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[12.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/communication-styles-make-a-difference?permid=12&offset=1#comment12)

[Bob G](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/927146/activities.html)

CT

February 3rd, 2011 1:23 pm

A finding that about 5 of each 6 contributors to Wikipedia are male results in NYT initiating a group discussion where 5 of the 6 invited to contribute are female. One group is open, the other by invitation only. Not sure what this means.

[Recommend](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/communication-styles-make-a-difference) Recommended Recommended by 7 Readers [Report as inappropriate](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/communication-styles-make-a-difference) Reported

[13.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/communication-styles-make-a-difference?permid=13&offset=1#comment13)

[Rosa Mimosa](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/58117324/activities.html)

NYC

February 3rd, 2011 1:27 pm

Maybe women are already doing or have too many other things to do than to submit info to Wikipedia. Maybe they have aleady done so and people think they are men. Maybe women are involved in actually being the people that get a bio in Wikipedia? .

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[Bruce Watson](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/1607873/activities.html)

Leverett, MA

February 3rd, 2011 1:28 pm

If you think Wikipedia is contentious, I'd strongly advise you to log off the Internet right now and never come back. Wikipedia is downright domestic when compared with any other user-generated site, including these comments on the Times. There must be some other reason.

[Recommend](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/communication-styles-make-a-difference) Recommended Recommended by 3 Readers [Report as inappropriate](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/communication-styles-make-a-difference) Reported

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albertross

Canada

February 3rd, 2011 1:28 pm

One thing being overlooked here is that, rather than just the tone of the conversation, body language is also a huge factor. In an online discussion, you can't read the body language of the people you're communicating with, and that could be a huge deterrent for women in general.  
  
Also, the fact that women are possibly being turned off by Wikipedia should be applauded. It's a self-important site run by petty intellectual thugs. IMHO, avoiding it just reflects good taste.

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[16.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/communication-styles-make-a-difference?permid=16&offset=1#comment16)

Blondie

Rochester, NY

February 3rd, 2011 1:35 pm

Women know better than to think they know everything for sure! I am sure there are many mistakes in it.

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MN

California

February 3rd, 2011 1:40 pm

In my case, the answer is simple. I am way too busy. I work full time, have 2 small children, and contributing to Wikipedia is certainly among the lowest priorities on my to-do list, even though I use it multiple times a day for reference.

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[18.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/communication-styles-make-a-difference?permid=18&offset=1#comment18)

[taterefromspain](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/62689993/activities.html)

Madrid

February 3rd, 2011 1:42 pm

I am not surprised at all, it is wikipedia or any other environment where participating implies competing, or show everybody better is not the "typical" woman's cup of tea...this reminds of the question "why is there such a low % of high women executives", differences in salaries, and a long etc.?  
  
...a part from the natural and by natural I mean biological differences that have clear influences in they way each sex approaches life, I believe here is an interesting link about men and women [disparity...(http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/women/women96.htm](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/disparity...%28http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/women/women96.htm" \t "_blank))  
  
and as for the question of where are the women? they are simply doing "women stuff".  
We have been historically educated (or not educated) for something else, and we are still sleeping but we will wake up one day and that day the world will be different; hopefully better.

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[19.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/communication-styles-make-a-difference?permid=19&offset=1#comment19)

[Jean](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/60296395/activities.html)

Jamaica - West Indies

February 3rd, 2011 1:44 pm

Women are crazy-busy - men have more time on their hands

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[20.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/communication-styles-make-a-difference?permid=20&offset=1#comment20)

[David Chowes](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/19856934/activities.html)

New York City

February 3rd, 2011 1:53 pm

WHO CARES?  
  
There are over 90% blacks in the NBA; male fashion designers are over whelmingly gay; Asians are disproportionatetly represented as Ivy Leauge students; in tennis woman play two out three sets while men: three out of five; so many baseball player form the Dominican Republic, and...  
  
Different stokes for different folks.  
  
With all the serious problems we all have in this world -- one wastes precious time on irrelevant so-called problem of more male "wikis" than females.

**Trolls and Other Nuisances**

**Updated** February 3, 2011, 06:10 PM

[**Terri Oda**](http://people.scs.carleton.ca/%7Etoda/) is a [web security researcher](http://webinsecurity.net/) at the Carleton Computer Security Laboratory. She writes about issues related to women in technology, gaming, science and software development at the [Geek Feminism blog](http://geekfeminism.org/).

I first heard about the Wikipedia survey on a email list filled with women in technical fields. Many said that they were Wikipedia contributors but they were not asked their gender or that their gender was “unassigned” on the site, which makes me wonder about the accuracy of the survey data.

Another factor might just be the time-consuming, frustrating nature of working with the site.

In any case, it’s worth noting that women have many strong reasons not to admit to being female if they want their contributions to be taken seriously and want to avoid harassment. Harassment or trolling [is a serious problem](http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Online_harassment), one that often drives women away from higher profile contributions.

Unfortunately, many discussion sites suffer from the tyranny of trolls who actively hinder women’s participation by trying to derail discussions, make contributions significantly more time-consuming, or send inappropriate or even violent private messages to contributors. I have no idea why they do this, but it seems to happen to many online communities so I presume there’s some subset of folk who think it's fun to drive away contributors.

If this is happening on Wikipedia, that could certainly reduce women's participation. Another factor might just be the [time-consuming, frustrating nature](http://ploum.net/post/222-why-i-don-t-contribute-to-wikipedia-anymore) of working with the site. Since women often have less time than their male counterparts, they may simply have chosen to contribute to other sites instead.

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[[ane Margolis](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/hearing-womens-voices)Previous Contributor **Hearing Women's Voices** Jane Margolis](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/hearing-womens-voices) [[usan C. Herring](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/communication-styles-make-a-difference)Next Contributor **A Difference of Communication Styles** Susan C. Herring](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/communication-styles-make-a-difference)

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[Nan](http://timespeople.nytimes.com/view/user/56221668/activities.html)

Portland

February 3rd, 2011 6:19 pm

Fair possibilities here. You also might consider that women are just not as big liars as men. : ) But seriously, I'm sure it really comes down to not wanting to identify as a female as it can be a hindrance.

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DrM

Germany

February 3rd, 2011 6:51 pm

Two thoughts:  
  
I am consistently dismayed by the number of unnecessarily unfriendly (if not outright hostile), unconstructive comments on many mainstream websites, in places such as the late Broadsheet, for example. (Let's not even mention Yahoo news.)  
  
I do enjoy reading comments on the NYT, but must point out that commentators (often male) in this discussion who say 'women are free to contribute to wikipedia, there's nothing stopping them' should realize that such a mindset is part of one of the main problems dogging any attempts at social equity: an entitled ignorance of the unfortunately common imbalance of unpaid household labor. Several women have commented that they would contribute more to wikipedia if not for other, more pressing family-related responsibilities.  
  
Both of these issues--trolling and entitled ignorance--are symptomatic of an inability to see things from a vantage point other than one's own, particularly if one is looking from a privileged position.

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[3.](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/02/02/where-are-the-women-in-wikipedia/trolls-and-other-nuisances?permid=3&offset=1#comment3)

tcurranmortgage

New York

February 3rd, 2011 7:07 pm

Thank you for a concise and, might I say, precise analysis. Trolls are an incredible nuisance when a person (male or female) thinks of the internet as basically "democratic." I've been harassed and flamed back during the real estate boom in online forums. I managed to control my reactions to such behavior, deciding to take the high road. I don't have any experience posting to Wikipedia, but if those editing sessions are anything like my previous experiences with trolls, bullies and flamers, well, it's not just the women who won't contribute. My opinion; not fact.

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