

Research and Scholarship for the 21st Century: The 2015 Art+Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-thon

Lydia Harrington



Plans for addressing the gendered exclusions of Wikipedia.

On March 7, 2015, I attended the Art+Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-thon held at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt) in Boston, Massachusetts. [1] Only a year earlier, in March 2014, the same week as International Women's Day, Art+Feminism founders Siân Evans, Jacqueline Mabey and Michael Mandiberg organized the first Edit-a-thon in New York City. Their goal was to increase the small number of articles written about women in the arts and the number of women editors (who make up only about 10% of Wikipedia editors) by offering training and guidance to participants. [2] It spurred simultaneous events in twenty other U.S. cities and in Canada, Europe, and Australia. [3] In its second year the Art+Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-thon has expanded to over 75 satellite events globally, "resulting in the creation of nearly 400 new pages and significant improvements to 500 articles on Wikipedia." [4] This event was of particular interest to me since it intersects both the arts and technology, areas in which women's participation is still met with obstacles, demonstrated by the work of groups such as the Guerilla Girls or individuals like Anna Sarkeesian, a feminist media critic who focuses on the harassment of women in online gaming culture and sexist representation of female characters in video games. [5]

The 2015 Boston Edit-a-thon was organized by Gabrielle Reed, Head of Access Services and Public Services Librarian at the MassArt library, and Amanda Rust, Assistant Director of the Digital Scholarship Group and Digital Humanities Librarian at Northeastern University Libraries. The event was held on a Saturday from 10 to 5, included childcare, and began with a tutorial by Amanda on how to create and edit Wikipedia pages. Its flexible format and warm, mutually supportive atmosphere allowed participants to come and go, exchange ideas about editing individual pages, and get personal assistance from the hosts. The range of participants varied widely by location. The MassArt Edit-a-thon was an intimate gathering and accommodated about six to

eight participants over the course of the day, all but one of them women. Additionally, each of the participants I talked to had a graduate degree and a career in academia. On the other end of the spectrum, the New York Edit-a-thon had around 1,500 participants this year. [6]



Participants at the Art+Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-thon, MassArt, Boston, MA, March, 2015.

I spoke with Gabrielle and Amanda to gain further insight into the experience of women editors and Edit-a-thon organizers. Both are committed to maintaining high standards of writing, research, and credibility for what is a widely used source that can, for better or worse, be edited by anyone. I asked if and how the project has a third-wave or intersectional feminist approach (i.e., inclusion of women of color, working class women, trans and queer women), which received enthusiastic responses. Gabrielle emphasized that, as “the only public art college in the country,” MassArt attracts a diverse student body, and this event in particular aimed to promote alumnae involvement. Amanda discussed how the identity of editors and the availability of secondary sources affects coverage on Wikipedia: “I think that, if allowed to, events like this could only re-inscribe problems of white feminists’ concerns, always sort of taking top billing. [...] topic needs to be covered in secondary sources before it gets into Wikipedia. If the contributions of people in lower economic classes or people of color or transgender people are underemphasized elsewhere, then at these events we run the risk of continuing that underemphasis.” [7] My experience at the MassArt Edit-a-thon leads me to believe that the future of Wikipedia can be more inclusive and progressive. The involvement of organizers like Amanda and Gabrielle with Art+Feminism, a grassroots network, affords them the opportunity to function as part of a larger organization. The aims of this wider network then get translated to the local level as organizers encourage and empower participants to write about and edit issues most relevant to individual interests and concerns.

How to Get Involved

Connect with Art+Feminism on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/artandfeminism>

Find it on Wikipedia to join the mailing list, find or organize an event near you and create or edit pages: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Meetup/ArtAndFeminism>

What Wikipedia is Not, a helpful guide to read before your first edit: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:What_Wikipedia_is_not

Endnotes:

[1] Art+Feminism website: <http://art.plusfeminism.org>

[2] Find exact percentage of editors (~9-13% women at time of survey): https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/76/Editor_Survey_Report_-_April_2011.pdf

The founders were named one of Foreign Policy Magazine's Leading Global Thinkers in 2014: <http://globalthinkers.foreignpolicy.com/#chroniclers/detail/evans-mabey-mandiberg-ptak-howard-knipel>

[3] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Meetup/ArtAndFeminism>; a Meetup is a face-to-face event between online Wikipedians.

[4] <http://art.plusfeminism.org/events/edit-a-thons/>

[5] Anna Sarkeesian's video webseries: <http://feministfrequency.com>

[6] <http://art.plusfeminism.org/events/edit-a-thons/>

[7] <http://art.plusfeminism.org/events/edit-a-thons/>