



## **Mind The Gender Gap on Wikipedia**

**Interviews with  
Charisse Kiino, SAGE Publishing  
&  
Ariel Cetrone, Wikimedia DC**

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**KENNEALLY:** The gender gap on Wikipedia has just narrowed thanks to volunteers who marked International Women’s Day this year with an edit-a-thon, creating and editing dozens of biographies for prominent women in the social and behavioral sciences.

Welcome to CCC’s podcast series. I’m Christopher Kenneally for Velocity of Content.

Wikipedia is the largest and most read reference work in history, an encyclopedia of human knowledge that anyone can edit, and tens of millions have. On March 8<sup>th</sup>, International Women’s Day, SAGE Publishing organized the edit-a-thon to highlight achievements of women researchers in social and behavioral science who explore the world to gain a better understanding of human behavior. From anthropology to psychology, their studies have supported efforts to improve individual mental health and can influence development of public health policies for communities and nations.

Charisse Kiino is vice president for product and market development with the US college division of SAGE Publishing. She joined others in Washington, London, and online for the edit-a-thon. Welcome to the program, Charisse.

**KIINO:** It’s great to be with you, Chris. Thanks so much for having me.

**KENNEALLY:** So we know the statistic – just 19% of Wikipedia biographies are for women. For an encyclopedia as massive as it is, Wikipedia is remarkably incomplete.

**KIINO:** Yeah, it’s so true. And given how much impact Wikipedia has as the fifth-most visited website in the world, the fact is even more startling.

**KENNEALLY:** SAGE is a distinguished publisher of books and journals in the social and behavioral science and was founded by a woman, Sara Miller McCune, who has had her own Wikipedia bio since 2012. What drew your attention to the Wikipedia gender gap in



these fields? Tell us a bit more about the role that women have played in the advancement of social and behavioral sciences.

**KIINO:** Women are critical to social and behavioral science research and instruction, from their pioneering work of new methodologies to the application of their work outside of academia on policy and practice. In fact, today, women fill more than 61% of social science-related occupations.

One of my colleagues actually was inspired to organize the event after hearing the startling statistics about women on Wikipedia from someone like Dr. Jessica Wade, who was interviewed on this very podcast and has dedicated so much time to adding entries about women on Wikipedia.

For us, it made sense to make a start by working on biographies of women in the social and behavioral sciences for a couple of reasons. First off, at Sage, 65% of our employees are women and do great work every day. So we want a resource like Wikipedia to reflect the amazing work that women are doing. And for my division, US college, one of our goals to make sure that all students from all backgrounds and abilities can see themselves in the pages of our textbook content. Shouldn't a resource like Wikipedia also reflect women's crucial role in social and behavioral science research? I want women in college to see that work and influence reflected in a site like Wikipedia.

**KENNEALLY:** Tell us about any of the stats on contributions made during the edit-a-thon.

**KIINO:** As you know, you didn't have to be in person in DC or London, though there were a group of us at each one of our SAGE offices doing the edit-a-thon. But we had quite a virtual presence and people reportedly coming in from seven different countries. And when we talked to some of the Wikimedia editors that were part of the event, they were saying a day – an edit-a-thon like we were a part of – a success would be if we were able to edit maybe 25 articles. And I'm really excited to report that we exceeded that goal. We added information to 18 articles and created 49 new profiles of women.

**KENNEALLY:** Do these Wikipedia biographies of women scientists and researchers play a role beyond simply answering questions about their work?

**KIINO:** I think it goes without saying that because of Wikipedia's reach, biographies help with discovery of both social science research and the social scientists themselves. In my opinion, Wikipedia plays a real legitimizing role and can be a confidence booster for many. Our authors will ask us often after we've published a book with them about how they can get their biography created, or if there's an existing one, how it can be edited to add more



of their work to their profile. I think it brings them a really big sense of accomplishment to see their work on such a widely used public-domain site.

And then that confidence works in a number of directions. Imagine you're a young girl wanting information on something that's important to you, and after multiple queries on Wikipedia, you rarely if ever see a woman researcher doing that work. What kind of message does that send to that young girl about the kinds of career choices she might make in the future about what she might want to do in academia? So we really want to close that gender gap, and we want that little girl to see the work that women social and behavioral scientists are doing.

KENNEALLY: Charisse Kiino with SAGE Publishing, what was it like for you to participate in the edit-a-thon? What was the experience like?

KIINO: I thought it was really eye-opening and fun to see that in this source like Wikipedia, with a little bit of training, how you can jump right in and add profiles and make the case for notability. So I really enjoyed it. I set up two profiles myself – brand new ones. With the training, they call them stub articles. So you're not responsible for putting this person's whole life story, but you kind of create a beginning, and then people will add to it and edit it over time. I felt a great sense of accomplishment that I did my little part in the edit-a-thon and getting more of the work of these really notable women out into the world.

KENNEALLY: Can you share with us who one of the biographies was for?

KIINO: Yes. One was with Dr. Jenine Harris, who's a methodologist at Washington University in St. Louis. We've published a book with her on statistics. She uses a program called R to teach students how to do statistical analysis. She's very involved and committed to the R community. It's a really great book, and she's a really stellar scholar that does a lot of her statistical research in public health. So one of the pieces that I put in her profile was the work that she does for the CDC on a review board that she's a part of.

KENNEALLY: Charisse Kiino with SAGE Publishing, thank you for joining me on Velocity of Content.

KIINO: Oh, I enjoyed it. Thanks so much, Chris.

KENNEALLY: Ariel Cetrone is the institutional partnerships manager for Wikimedia DC, a regional outreach affiliate for Wikipedia and other projects of the Wikimedia Foundation. She helps organizations, institutions, and agencies engage with Wikimedia to help improve the world's largest online encyclopedia. Welcome to Velocity of Content, Ariel.



CETRONE: Hi, Chris. Thanks for having me.

KENNEALLY: Well, we look forward to hearing more about the edit-a-thon. Anyone, you tell us, can edit Wikipedia, but there are important guidelines that every entry must respect. What are they, briefly?

CETRONE: Topics and subjects added to Wikipedia must meet what we call the notability requirement. In order to be notable or what we call important enough to be included in Wikipedia, the topic or subject should have two to three, at least, high-quality sources published in a verifiable, reliable source or variety of sources that support that it's important, that support that it's notable.

For example, in our event that we did with SAGE, we focused on biographies of women. Now, we wanted to make sure before we started working on those biographies that we could find sources about the women that talked about the work and the research that they were doing. Many of them were professors. I believe all of them were published. Many of them had profile pieces featured on them in other publications. So we wanted to make sure that we could find sources that supported their notability in a variety of verifiable publications. That really is the number-one thing you want to do before writing. Unfortunately, as we'll get into, the gender gap makes this a little difficult, but we'll get to that in a moment.

KENNEALLY: Well, as you say, Ariel, the Wikipedia gender gap arises from a variety of areas, from the predominance of male contributors and from the challenge presented by Wikipedia's principle of notability that you were just talking about. A Wikipedia biography must refer to previously published materials, yet if women are underrepresented as Wikipedians and elsewhere, that sounds like a catch-22 bind.

CETRONE: It really is. And as you said, it's what perpetuates the gender gap. So at these events that we do, of course, we encourage individuals to write new articles, especially when working on biographies, and cite existing sources. Now, if we can't find those sources, we can't write those articles. Of course, as we know, an encyclopedia like Wikipedia is a tertiary source, and the role of that source is to find and identify published resources that already have this information, and then we take that information, put in the encyclopedia – into Wikipedia, in this case – and cite our sources.

So one of the things I like to do at our events, because we typically work with agencies, organizations, institutions, and beyond – and in this case with SAGE, we worked with a lot of individuals who were published, who are in publishing – we encourage our partners and anybody listening here – if you are in the position to write about women, if you are in the position where you can get the word out, publish profile pieces on the women, talk about



their work, talk about what they're doing in their fields, then once that information is out there and published, we are able to cite it either at edit-a-thons or individual editors on their own that are working within Wikipedia and Wikimedia projects. Then we will be able to cite those materials and create those articles.

So while we can't do this gender gap work in Wikipedia alone, we can encourage any colleagues that we come across to help us by getting the word out. Publish the materials. Talk about these women. Talk about individuals making an impact in their fields. Because that's really the only way we're going to get it into Wikipedia. And hopefully at some point in the not-so-far-away future, we'll be able to find just as many secondary sources about women in whatever fields they may be in as we do about men.

**KENNEALLY:** Ariel Cetrone with Wikimedia DC, if I don't consider myself an expert, can I still contribute to Wikipedia?

**CETRONE:** Yes. One of the great things about Wikipedia is that anyone can create a username and anyone can edit. Of course, as an outreach affiliate, we provide a lot of educational opportunities. Other affiliates around the world do as well. But you do not have to attend an edit-a-thon to learn how to edit Wikipedia. There are resources both on Wiki and online that you can find. You can always go to our website, [wikimediadc.org](http://wikimediadc.org), to learn how to contact me and come to an event, whether online or virtual.

But anybody can really edit. Anybody can participate. One of the things that we find is that individuals find it fun. Once they realize that they can really contribute to the world's largest online encyclopedia, they want to participate. They want to see how it works, and they want to get in there for the most part and give it a try. Whether or not they are retained as editors, that's another story. But we as an affiliate try to do what we can to make sure they have the skills to do so.

**KENNEALLY:** A diversity of content and diverse contributors to Wikipedia certainly strengthens the encyclopedia. But tell us more about what's in it for the volunteers. Why do they tell you they choose to do this and take the time, really, to work on Wikipedia?

**CETRONE:** This is an interesting question. There's been a few studies that have asked – and surveys that have informed the studies that have asked editors, why do you edit? Why do you do this? Well, as I mentioned in my previous answer, one of the reasons is fun. Some editors find this fun. I particularly am one of them. I have subjects that I edit on in my free time. I have subjects that I edit when I'm helping others learn how to edit articles or create articles about other subjects or topics. So fun is part of it.



Another reason is altruism. It's been highlighted as one of the contributing factors to why people edit. Some people like to get information out there, and individuals who are motivated by the gender gap issue – it may be something that they're already interested in in other fields – improving content about women in other areas. That is motivating. They want to take the time to get the information out there.

As you mentioned in the beginning, Wikipedia is the largest encyclopedia of its kind. It is also typically in the top 10 most-visited websites on the planet. And we want to make sure – and those editors who are using their time to edit – we want to make sure that people looking for information can find it. So that really is a motivator as well.

Another motivator that has been identified is self-fulfillment. It makes people feel good about what they're doing. And I think many editors that we work with and editors, even, out there just editing on their own, whether as part of an event or on their free time, will say that they feel good after getting content into Wikipedia, because if your content has the right sources, the topic or subject is notable, once you publish in English Wikipedia, your changes are live immediately, which means that you can go and see that it's there. You can see the impact it's having. There are tools within Wikimedia that you can use to track how many people are looking at what you've added to Wikipedia. So being able to share that with your friends sometimes – it can prop you up. It can make you feel good about the work and what you're doing. I go back and look at the articles that I've edited quite frequently and track them to see how many people are looking at them. It really is a good feeling.

Of course, on the flip side, when the work that you've done is reverted, it's not such a good feeling, but we try to encourage people to engage with other editors when that happens and work through the process of proving notability and making sure that what you're doing should be on Wikipedia. But when it sticks, it's really, really great.

KENNEALLY: Ariel Cetrone for Wikimedia DC, thanks for speaking with me today about the SAGE Publications edit-a-thon.

CETRONE: Thank you.

KENNEALLY: That's all for now. Our producer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. You can subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts, and please do follow us on Twitter and on Facebook. You can also find Velocity of Content on YouTube as part of the CCC channel. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Goodbye.

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