

ADDRESSING WIKIPEDIA’S GENDER GAP: TOWARDS A FULL INCLUSION OF INTERSEX, TRANS, AND NON-BINARY GENDER IDENTITIES

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Abstract

This research explores qualitatively (mainly through personal interviews) how Wikipedia’s gender gap affects intersex, trans and non-binary people and offers constructive proposals to move towards full inclusion in terms of representation (content) and participation (community of editors).

Keywords: Wikipedia’s gender gap, intersex, trans, non-binary, interviews.

Introduction

The gender gap in Wikipedia is a widely documented problem. In Wikipedia in Spanish, less than 25% of the content is women’s biographies and less than 1% refers to other genders’ biographies (Humaniki, n.d). In terms of editing, it has been reported that the percentage of female editors is between 10% and 15% or even lower in the English Wikipedia (Antin et al. 2011) and there are no significant data on other gender identities. As Heather Ford and Judy Wajcman (2017) argue, beyond the number of female editors, the gender gap has to do with an entire infrastructure and technical expertise that is gendered, as well as the culture of knowledge production and the masculine, Western, conservative epistemologies to which it is ascribed.

All this scientific evidence pushes in the direction of incorporating gender-inclusive policies in Wikipedia, both in terms of the representation of its contents and in terms of the participation of its editors. However, it is important to note that the gender gap has been mostly analysed in binary gender terms (male-female), assuming a cisgender neutrality that does not correspond to the lived experiences and self-identification of part of the community of editors of the various Wikipedias. In fact, out of 98 academic papers systematically reviewed, only 16,7% of them utilised a non-binary approach. A surprising finding is that using Wikidata sets brings more gender diversity in research as it encompasses seven different identities in ‘sex or gender’ property (Ferran-Ferrer, Boté and Minguillón 2023). In the documentation table of Property 21 (sex or gender), the allowed gender values are around 50. Therefore, the binary

and cisgender approach results in a limitation for a nuanced understanding of how the gender gap affects people who identify their gender as outside the male-female binarism, which we will consider in this study under the non-binary intersex and trans identities, although we recognize that the range of gender identities in the non-binary spectrum is indeed plural and broader (Metilli and Paolini, forthcoming).

Addressing Wikipedia’s gender gap from the inclusion of the diverse gender identities is regarded as crucial in the era of big data due to the biases inherent in such data, which can result in unfairness and contribute to discriminatory applications that affect the marginalised sections of society, as highlighted in various studies (Metilli and Paolini, forthcoming).

Methods

The aim of our ongoing research is to understand how the gender gap affects people who are outside the gender binary (intersex, trans and non-binary), and to make constructive proposals for mechanisms that can be implemented in Wikipedia to reduce the gender gap and move towards full inclusion of this collective, both in terms of content and representation (to favour the visibility of Wikipedia biographies of intersex, trans and non-binary people who have made their gender identity public) and in terms of inclusion within the editing community of the different Wikipedias (to favour that Wikipedians can ascribe to non-binary gender identity as part of their self-representation on the Wikipedia platform). To achieve these objectives, our research will focus on the communities of 3 different Wikipedias: in English, Spanish and Catalan. Our research will have a qualitative approach and will include the following methodologies:

Scoping review: We will conduct a systematised literature review in interdisciplinary scientific journals that examine the presence and representation of intersex, trans and non-binary identities in the digital public sphere, specifically in digital platforms, online user communities and in Wikipedia.

Semi-structured in-depth personal interviews: We will use this qualitative methodology to examine two groups: on the one hand, we will interview Wikipedians involved in editing Wikipedia who are active in LGBTIQ+ Wikiprojects in Wikipedias in English, Spanish and Catalan. We have

identified the “Wikiproject LGBT Studies” in the English Wikipedia, the “Wikiproyecto LGBT+” in the Spanish Wikipedia and the “Viquiprojecte LGBTIQ+” in the Catalan Viquipèdia. On the other hand, we will interview Wikipedia’s volunteers and people involved with the Wikimedia Foundation and its chapters in Spain (Fundación Wikimedia España) and Catalonia (Amical Wikimedia). These interviews seek to identify the specific measures and actions are being carried out by the community to bridge the gender gap, including affirmative action around the representation of gender diversity in Wikipedia, the promotion of LGTBIQ+ people’s health, the development of protocols and strategies against discrimination and virtual harassment, etc.

We will also consider the ethical concerns from the Wikipedia community that came up about the potential risks of making gender visible in editors’ biographies or profiles when we presented our project “Wikidata to Gender Rescue on Wikipedia”. Some concerns included the unwanted outing, risks of experiencing discrimination in their social and political contexts, colonialism implicit in using non-binary as an umbrella term for several gender identities, etc. In this regard, we would like to clarify that both Wikidata and Wikipedia always rely on sources of information to construct the biographies, and in no case are newly created data incorporated. At the editor profile level, the inclusion of a non-binary gender option would be an extension of the

existing “male”, “female” and “not specified” options, so that those who wish to publicly self-identify as such can do so. In short, our proposal seeks to mirror information that already exists online to promote a more ethical and realistic representation of non-binary identities on Wikipedia.

Results

As this is ongoing research, we have no concrete results to comment on at this stage. However, the prospective results point to the fact that the gender gap severely and specifically affects identities that fall outside the gender binary: intersex and trans, and non-binary people.

Discussion/Conclusions

The present study aims to establish the conceptual framework for a research project that intends to utilise the comprehensive ontologies of Wikidata pertaining to gender identities, to enrich the knowledge organisation system of Wikipedia through a taxonomy. Notably, only a select group of community members are authorised to decide on the admissibility of categories (in the form of tags in the folksonomy) for certain identities such as women and non-binary individuals, which facilitate the process of content retrieval and access.

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