Wikipedia and the Outsider Within: Black Feminism and Racialized, Gendered Knowledge Sharing

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Introduction
This article contributes to existing scholarship by focusing critical attention on the English language Wikipedia's racialized, gendered knowledge politics. We do so by exploring the knowledge politics of Wikipedia through a Black feminist lens, with particular attention to Patricia Hill Collins' (1986) concept of Black women as "the outsider within" in academic spaces, and to some extent, in Wikipedia as well.

Methods
This paper analyzes student experiences on Wikipedia via a 2018 class assignment in which predominantly Black, female, undergraduate students at Howard University were tasked with analyzing and then improving content on Wikipedia.

Findings
The students had a variety of experiences adding content. Some editors discouraged the students from writing, some deleted the students' contributions with varying degrees of explanation as to why they had done so, while others constructively edited the students' work by correcting spelling or grammar mistakes, pointing out claims that needed further citation or in other ways engaging the students' work. Many, but not all of the students made additions that responded to Wikipedia's problems with racism and sexism. As with any class, student work varied in quality, from contributions that were well written, well cited, and well-integrated into existing content, to other efforts that struggled in one or multiple of these categories. Here, we focus on Wikipedia articles on which students worked that failed to include or mention people of color or women relevant to the subject matter, were anti-Black, or in other ways centered whiteness and/or men, as well as interactions with other editors that highlight racialized, gendered knowledge sharing practices on Wikipedia. We found that:

- Racialized and gendered content gaps on subjects related to food and agriculture proliferate on Wikipedia

- Established editors engage in gatekeeping practices that likely have racialized and gendered outcomes on who contributes to Wikipedia.
- Wikipedians draw on their lived experiences in assessing what is and is not factual
- Requirements for subjects to be notable and supported by credible sources have racialized and gendered impacts due to inequities in academia and journalism
- We did not experience edit wars, vandalism, threats, or trolls. Lack of experience of edit wars may be partly due to the training students received in the class, in which students were warned against participating in behaviors that could escalate into edit wars.

We (the white, female instructor and three Black, female students who completed the class project) argue that while Wikipedia strives to be unbiased through building content around peer-reviewed publications and reputable news sources, as well as dissuading contributors from writing from their personal experiences, it can not only extend, but also exacerbate pro- white male biases present in academia and the press through, 1) the subjects covered, 2) the editing process, and 3) the requirement for subjects to be deemed "noteworthy" through sufficient peer-reviewed scholarly work or news coverage, and 4) the majority white male demographic of Wikipedia contributors.

Discussion
The articles our class improved have since been seen by millions. Nonetheless, such assignments may not be a viable way to fix Wikipedia's racialized and sometimes racist content. Despite their generally positive experiences with the assignment, and some students' stated interest in continuing to edit Wikipedia, none of our student editors kept contributing to Wikipedia after the end of the course. This suggests low retention rates for the Wikipedia editors among the more diverse pool (Davis 2021) who are introduced to Wikipedia via Wiki Education supported courses like ours. Wiki Education staff does not expect to retain significant numbers of students as editors through their course projects. Rather, their focus is on retaining instructors who run such assignments, and in doing so

provide a regular stream of new edits via the rotating groups of students they oversee (personal communication, Davis 2022). Still, the content that people add through organized classes such as this pale in comparison to the sheer volume of new content constantly being added to Wikipedia. For example, in the fall of 2018, our students added 1 new article, and contributed to 17 existing articles. During the same three-month period, Wikipedia grew by 762,769 articles (Anon n.d.). One solution might be to continue scaling up Wiki Education's work in hopes of the edits made through this program "catching up" with, or perhaps surpassing, those of the rest of the Wikipedia editors. However, we suspect that if Wiki Education's work scales up to this level and significantly diversifies the pool of new editors, conflict between the new and more diverse editors and the better established, predominantly white Wikipedians will grow stronger.

Also, our Wikipedia assignment's ability to contribute in these areas benefited from the combined influence of the institutional space of a historically black university, the ever-accumulating life experiences and analyses of the students and the instructor who worked and learned there, and a long history of Black intellectual production and the intellectual production of those in conversation with them. This should serve as a reminder that while the student population with which Wiki Education works is more diverse than the existing Wikipedians, the likelihood of those students addressing Wikipedia's many equity problems depends on many things: their life experiences, education in institutions of formal learning as well as in their family and communities, their intellectual interests, the course topic in which they are assigned to contributed to Wikipedia, the readings assigned in those courses, and the instructor's pre-selection of Wikipedia articles that have equity problems for students to address and ability to point students toward usable sources to fix these problems.

Regardless of whether or not student contributions will ever be able to "catch up" with new content generated by other users, a clear benefit of the course assignment is the learning experience it provides for students in identifying problematic information, understanding the ways that it propagates in knowledge creation and sharing spaces, and in the confidence they gain in their ability to intervene in such spaces. Wikipedia's content problems are intimately linked to larger problems of racism, sexism and other 'isms that pervade academia, journalism, education and the world at large, underscoring the difficulty of giving a positive answer to the question posed by Charlton McIlwain in *Black Software,* "Will our current or future technological tools ever enable us to outrun white supremacy?" (McIlwan 2020). While much of Silicon Valley culture fetishizes the many tools of digital technology, the way these tools are designed and wielded in the context of vast social inequalities matters more. The technological fact of Wikipedia's existence does not enable us to "outrun white supremacy." Rather, fixing Wikipedia's content problems means creating a Wikipedia community that can somehow rise above the racism and sexism of the world in which it is saturated. It also means fixing the racist, sexist knowledge creation processes that create the information Wikipedia hopes to synthesize. These are fundamentally political tasks.

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