

CONFERENCE PAPERS

University of Canterbury Feminist Society's third annual feminist conference (17–18 September 2016): Selected papers

INTRODUCTION: KARA KENNEDY, University of Canterbury

The sense of community that feminist conferences can cultivate is one of their highlights, along with the variety of feminist ideas to be discussed, considered, and shared. Thus, the University of Canterbury Feminist Society (UC FemSoc) considers it important and worthwhile to organise an annual conference in order to offer a time and space for this feminist work. In September 2016, UC FemSoc held its third annual feminist conference (#UCFemSoc16) at the University of Canterbury and was generously supported financially by the university's College of Arts. The conference featured a wide variety of topics – from motherhood and body politics to animal studies and issues in the global south – and was attended by students and staff as well as community members interested in learning about the current state of feminism in academia and the wider world, and meeting others interested in feminism.

Yet the conference almost did not happen because of turnover in the FemSoc executive – which meant that people who had run the previous two conferences were unavailable – and the fact that it is a labour-intensive event that several of the 2016 executive were unable to take on. It seemed unacceptable to let this much-appreciated space for feminist learning and sharing in Christchurch fall to the wayside, so I took on the role of conference organiser with less than a month and a half until the date the club had originally wanted to host the conference. This meant hurriedly distributing a call for proposals across Aotearoa/New Zealand and then, after a heartening response, moving on to all of the work involved in planning such an event: advertising, creating materials, booking rooms, recruiting moderators, planning catering, and communicating with presenters. I discovered how difficult it is to find childcare for events such as conferences, and how little this need is attended to by the professional world (and why this topic keeps coming up as an unresolved issue at other conferences I attend). Thankfully, one of the executive who is a mother put me in touch with a caregiver she knows and trusts, and the club was able to pay her to provide childcare for several conference attendees.

Ultimately, the club needed to run two streams of paper sessions because there were 18 presentations to schedule over the two weekend days. To add to the usual conference fare, I borrowed an idea from Jenny Rankine at the Women's Studies Association (NZ)/Pae Akoranga Wāhine conference I had just attended and carved out space for a social media workshop, where participants could create their own feminist memes. This was a popular session, and I obtained permission to share some of the memes on the club's social media pages. I also held two Wikipedia workshops to explain why the lack of diversity on the site is a problem and then show participants how they could make edits and contribute to articles in which they were interested. The downside of being an organiser was that I was unable to attend many of the sessions, but there were many interesting and stimulating conversations during teatimes and lunch. I also enjoyed having support from a small group of volunteers who pitched in when needed and ensured the conference was a success.

What follows are four papers that constitute a sampling of the feminist ideas and energy present at the conference. F. J. Dalzell's *A veterinary perspective on effective feminism in philosophy* compares changes in the veterinary medicine and philosophy professions in Aotearoa/New Zealand and explores why the latter is still resistant to gender parity. Dalzell analyses examples of sexist comments and the traditions of the fields themselves, concluding that appeals to rational thinking may not be the best defence against gender bias. Chandan Bose's *Craft as everyday site of assertion: How do artisans talk about gender and skill?* examines the author's ethnographic fieldwork in South India with a focus on how gender distinctions appear in the language used for craft skills. Bose draws on two women's stories to analyse how they envision their role in the craft that they help create and how that shapes their understanding of themselves. Kyra Gillies' *Intersectional poetry: Spoken poetry as a platform for feminist thought free from tone policing* includes an analysis of the medium of spoken poetry as an impactful platform for feminist thought as well as transcripts of two of the poems Gillies performed at the conference. Gillies explains how spoken poetry can be a way of combating the silencing of oppressed groups by allowing them to speak in their own words with their preferred word choice and delivery style. The poems *New Zealand* and *How we learn to hate (This is not an apology)* then offer emotive critiques of various issues in the country. My own contribution, *Why women should be editing Wikipedia*, argues that the popular crowd-sourced site needs more diversity in its editorship, especially women. I provide an overview of the issue as well as practical steps that can be taken to encourage more women and underrepresented groups to contribute to Wikipedia.

Although feminist and gender studies programmes may be an increasingly rare find in Aotearoa/New Zealand universities, it is clear that scholars and activists continue to think, reflect, write, and speak about a broad range of feminist issues that interest them. The theme of the 2016 conference was 'Raising our voices', and my hope is that they only grow louder.

A veterinary perspective on effective feminism in philosophy

F. J. DALZELL

Abstract

This paper considers and compares two academic areas of feminist interest within Aotearoa/New Zealand – veterinary medicine in the 1970s and philosophy in the present. The veterinary profession is of interest because in the last 30 years the profession has moved from complete male dominance to gender parity (Allen, 2016). However, the position of women in philosophy has declined markedly in both numbers and seniority over the same period (Rini, 2013). Although each discipline has produced internal research examining the position of its own women members, an interdisciplinary approach has yet to be attempted. This paper attempts to take the first steps on this interdisciplinary journey using as a starting point personal anecdotes from a veterinary surgeon who is now in postgraduate philosophy.

One possibly significant difference between philosophy and veterinary medicine is the approach of each to the concept of 'human exceptionalism.' This is the belief that humans are in some way 'exceptional' and different from other species in a morally significant way. The number of philosophers who consider animals to be potentially of equal worth to humans is small. The most notable of these is Peter Singer, who is regularly vilified for his beliefs that humans are just another animal (Singer, 1976). The vast majority of veterinarians, on the other hand, express strong beliefs that humans are just another animal and as a profession do not privilege their own species with any special elevating properties (Kirwan, 2005).

The default assumption of a feminist veterinarian, unlike a philosopher, is that humans are just another type of animal and that, although some humans may display rationality some of the time, few, if any, display it all the time. Males of many species tend to be more aggressive and more dangerous when challenged during periods of declining testosterone (Lincoln, 2001), which in a human can start at age 35 (Donca et al., 2012). Considering the

progress female veterinarians have made in a short period of time, this assumption of human rationality might be one area worthy of challenge and exploration.

My initial hypothesis, therefore, is that treating male philosophers as rational animals may not be in and of itself a rational act, and that feminist progress in philosophy will only come about by embracing a Kantian 'animality' rather than 'rationality', and will require methodologies other than rational discourse to ensure progress.

Keywords

Philosophers, veterinary medicine, feminism, Kant, direct action

Introduction

This perspective article is written from the viewpoint of a lifelong feminist. But that viewpoint is informed by my introduction to academic life at Massey University in veterinary science and by my present position as a PhD student in philosophy. This gives me the somewhat dubious honour of having travelled from what was arguably the most overtly sexist academic discipline of last century to the most objectively sexist academic discipline of this century (Bowell, 2015).

Despite women making up nearly one third of the PhD postgraduate philosophy job market (Dodds & Goddard, 2013), if the past continues to predict the future, for every 21 academic positions in philosophy available in New Zealand, only one will go to a woman. Since 2005, only one woman in the entire country has secured a permanent academic position in philosophy, whereas 20 men have acquired such positions (Rini, 2013).

Yet, in veterinary medicine, the reverse happened. Over 30 years, the profession has transformed itself from the most sexist to one of the most equitable (Tremayne, 2010). As a recent demonstration of this veterinary sea change, there was outrage amongst the entire profession when the then chancellor of Massey University, Chris Kelly, claimed in a column written about the need for more practical training,

but the problem is one woman graduate is equivalent to two-fifths of a full-time equivalent vet throughout her life because she gets married and has a family, which is normal ...

The sheer volume of hostile professional opinion forced him to step down immediately (Harris, 2016).

Entry based on academic performance alone has served women in veterinary science well. Undergraduate classes the world over now have women in the majority (Tremayne, 2010). The numbers of women in academic positions from professorship down have increased dramatically the world over. Lincoln (2010) reported that the numbers of women in academic positions in veterinary faculties in the United States had risen from 4% in 1975 to 24% by 1995. Presently, the veterinary faculty at Massey University is nearly 50% women (Massey, 2017). Meanwhile, philosophy has become even more exclusive of women than either physics or engineering (Bowell, 2015). This really does matter if one is a feminist. The *Wall Street Journal* recently claimed that a major in philosophy was the best paid liberal arts degree (Anders, 2016), as did *Forbes* magazine (Dorfman, 2014). So if women do not do philosophy, then they are being denied access to potentially the most lucrative jobs in the humanities. Women in Aotearoa/ New Zealand still earn, on average, 12% less than men (Statistics New Zealand, 2016). As feminists, we should support women having access to the best paid jobs in the arts, even if only to try to improve the gender pay gap. Obviously, philosophy is more valuable than mere financial worth, but – unlike eudemonia – pay rates are easily ranked and measured.

Looking for the problem

Even if we accept women should have access to the best-paying jobs, how to go about creating this access is more challenging. It requires identification and removal of the obstructions women face in philosophy that cause them to leave or avoid the subject. But when the obstacles are poorly defined and unspecified, and women themselves have trouble articulating the exact nature of these obstacles, this becomes even more challenging. One method of gaining clarity in such a complex situation is a basic comparative study. Identifying key areas of difference in analogous areas of academic endeavour that have made greater feminist progress could be a starting point.

Finding the common problem

Some might claim that philosophy and veterinary medicine are too dissimilar to be analogous. Admittedly, learning the fine art of prostatic massage in bulls has a certain aesthetic quality difference to the quiet contemplation of Kant. But the philosophical challenges faced by women in both academic settings are similar. In defence of this claim, I share two anecdotal experiences and compare the arguments underpinning the various male claims.

To start with veterinary medicine – this a quote from my first professional year in veterinary school, in 1980, delivered by a male head of department in an introduction to the school and recorded in my personal journal at the time:

I do not want you here. You are taking a job from a man, and your real role is to be a wife and mother, and you should be supporting a man, not pretending to be one. I have a God-given duty to make you realise you should not be here and I will get rid of you all if I can!

I replied that I had a right to work, like any man. The head of department called the restaurant that was my only source of income. He demanded I be sacked, because women ought to be supported by their fathers, not working.

The following is a quote from a fellow philosophy PhD student in 2016. I am the only woman PhD student in our department, amongst ten men. I asked him why he thought there were so few women in philosophy classes, as his PhD is in the philosophy of education:

Well, girls only like the “fluffy, girly” subjects, so not the analytical subjects, like theory of mind, or logic. They like ethics and that sort of thing. And you can’t have those “girly” things at 300 level. It has to be proper subjects like logic. So the big problem is, do we “dumb” down philosophy, and make it more “girly”, or do we keep our standards and just accept that it will not appeal to girls because they can’t do it? Big moral question there!

If we look at those two claims, separated by four decades and two very different disciplines, they are surprisingly similar in significant ways. In both cases, the men are saying that women’s physical and intellectual inequality is an observation of fact, a fact created by a ‘higher power’ beyond mere mortal males. For my head of department, this higher being was God. For my colleague, the higher power was evolution. Obviously, if only women were equal, we could be treated as equal, but some higher being or power has made women lesser beings.

In the veterinary school case, the higher power was some god, but a suspiciously White male supremacist version of god, whereas in the philosophy case the authority is science, the modern male secular version of God (White, 1967). These arguments are similar. In both cases there is an abdication of male responsibility for their treatment of women as inferior, based on a spurious authority fallacy.

For philosophers, the platinum-level response to these claims would be in the form of a well-argued, reasonable article using certain conventions of argument in a work that will be cited for generations to come. In philosophy, the form and process counts as much as the conclusion in a seemingly victory. Veterinary medicine, in contrast, is by nature driven by duties and obligations, whilst being defined by clinical outcomes. Our duty is to relieve suffering and cure disease, which by nature is an ongoing quest for improvement, thus involving a more promiscuous approach to methodology.

So, when my PhD colleague told me women could not do analytical philosophy, I engaged with him as a fellow philosopher, in the methodology of philosophers. I tried to change his mind through reasoned argument. I reminded him that my PhD research, for which I had won prizes already, was on metaphysics, Kant, and the theory of mind. This was his reply:

Yes, but you are not a “proper” woman, you’re not a normal female, now are you?

I cannot refute a claim that I am improper. Veterinarians are admittedly poor guests at dinner parties given their proclivities for biological conversation. We also arrive late to social gatherings smelling of unthinkable bodily fluids. However, the claim that I am not a proper woman in the other sense, that of authenticity, is an extraordinary one. Since Simone de Beauvoir’s seminal work, *The second sex*, gender has been seen as a construct, and the binary nature of gender has also been rejected in favour of a continuum. Claims that there may be one proper woman are nonsense, although my colleague clearly favours the proper male Nietzsche over the improper female de Beauvoir:

When a woman has scholarly inclinations there is generally something wrong with her sexual nature. (Nietzsche, 2003, p. 144)

However, the concerning assumption embedded within my colleague’s premise is not the question of whether I am actually female (as if that even matters). It is that my male colleague has appointed himself as the adjudicator of my sexual identity. How we define our sex is usually left to ourselves as a matter of personal autonomy, because it is typically assumed that we are the only ones able to access our own subjective experiences.

Even if we wish to go old school and adopt a purely biological definition of gender, access to information about another being’s DNA is not the sort of thing obtainable by even the most penetrating neck-to-toe male gaze. So not only did my colleague appoint himself as an arbitrator of sex, he modestly endowed himself with the superpower of x-ray crystallography vision. My colleague has resorted to a secondary claim – that I am obviously a mutant – in order to defend his primary claim that women are inferior genetically and cannot ‘do’ philosophy. When I challenged his assertion about my mutant status, he sidestepped the DNA issue. He offered his ‘coup de grâce’ with a satisfied smile. If my argument skills were that great, I could convince people like him that women could be great analytic philosophers. So according to him, the fact that I had not won him over, despite the prizes for my research, was evidence that he was right about women after all.

In philosophy, it is common to blame female philosophers for not being good enough philosophers to convince men to be rational or unbiased.

Consequences of the problem

The real problem here is not personal; it is political. This same someone, the one happy to claim I am not a natural woman but a mutant, and that only he can access my first person subjective experience, has a significant corner on the job market. Women constitute one third of PhDs, yet get 5% of jobs. Men constitute two thirds of the PhDs, yet claim 95% of the jobs.

As Rini (2013) reported, only one permanent job in academic philosophy in Aotearoa/New Zealand went to a woman between 2005 and 2013, so my colleague is significantly more likely than me to obtain a permanent position in academia and considerably more likely than me to have the opportunity to pass on these enlightened ideas to the next generation in a sustained manner. The crux here is that bigotry is just that, whether it is dressed up in white robes like the second coming as divine command theory, or scantily clad in the offcuts of reason, held like a fig leaf over the pelvic plexus of male privilege. As the feminist philosopher Tracy Bowell (2015) said, ‘Philosophy as a discipline fails to meet its own standards of enquiry’ (p. 10).

A veterinary solution

Traditionally, philosophy has relied upon argument theory and reason as its sole methodology. Offering a perfectly rational argument that is then ignored, dismissed, patronised, or deliberately belittled makes silence the only polite option in the face of clearly delusional claims. To persist in asking for reason from the unreasonable is, itself, irrational. It is a world of emperor’s new clothes that never have a woman’s cut.

Veterinary medicine differs in approach. If castration does not solve the problem of undesirable male behaviour, a host of other modalities exist: androgen blockers, female hormone analogues, and behavioural modifications, to name a few. In short, if surgery does not work, you drop the scalpel, you do not keep incising. Obviously, I am not suggesting the application of these veterinary techniques to problematic male philosophers. If rational exchange is being deflected or avoided because of sexist ideology, rational discourse descends into valueless sophistry. Yet philosophy can only offer silence as an alternative.

For young women in veterinary school, male irrationality was a daily experience. Some male lecturers refused to take women out on clinical rotations because their wives allegedly feared improper goings-on. Clearly, such perceptions of irresistible attractiveness were entirely untethered from reality. Young women seldom commit mass crimes of passion at the first whiff of a sweaty and yeast-ridden late middle-aged armpit in a Toyota Hiace van filled with faecal collection pots. Yet complaints about female exclusion were brushed off with the perennial claim that this was what being a vet was like: it was tough. If we could not deal with it, that was a sign they were right all along, women just could not hack it. The ultimate begging of the question fallacy.

The veterinary prescription – direct action

In the face of clearly irrational claims, we never considered attempting to change the minds of these chauvinist men. And why should we? We do not expect individual Black people to assume the mantle of educator and mentor of every White supremacist they meet. That would be an appalling and unjust expectation. The power of anonymous direct action through an appeal to Kantian ‘animality’ over ‘rationality’ arose, appropriately, through a consideration of the species discrimination. A male staff member stated in lectures on bovine reproduction that women were different to cows in just one way: ‘women were always on heat if you knew how to handle them.’

Rational discourse proved pointless. So another strategy was formulated. The offending male member had his office visited late one Friday night. The frozen bodies of two dozen ferrets were strategically deployed throughout, from the filing cabinet to the air conditioning unit. By Monday morning, the consequences were self-evident and permeated the entire building. The odour was such that a mere moment in his office resulted in a persistent, undesirable, and

unique olfactory signature. A symbolic item was left to make sure he understood the connection between his behaviour and this particular outcome. Students would cover their noses, make gagging noises as he entered class. There was a subtle shift in the power balance.

One reason smell offensives work well is that the olfactory nerve communicates directly with the limbic system, the most primitive part of the brain beneath the cortex, which is the origin of emotion and moral impulses (Greene, 2014). It is also the sense that is the most successful at bypassing rational thought. The ferret action resulted in an immediate cessation of sexist comments in class and gave birth to a culture of direct action found to be more suited to male sensibilities. What went on in the colonic recesses of his mind was not our concern. All we wanted was an opportunity for equal education. If we achieved this means through fairness or fear, it mattered not for our ends.

It is commonly accepted that silencing someone disempowers them, but this can be a positive feminist action if the one silenced is an oppressing voice.

Consequences

Historically and globally, male veterinary students the world over have been given a tremendous amount of leniency in ‘prank’ behaviours. Behavioural outlets were deemed necessary and inevitable for high-pressured, demanding vocations. Satire of the staff was accepted as part of the recognition that on graduation all veterinarians are part of a fraternity, a common profession. Science training also confers skills conducive to physical pranking, such as the creation of small explosives. Women vet students were able to appropriate and subvert a long male tradition dating back to the eighteenth century very successfully for their own ends.

However, philosophy does not have this tradition. Nor do philosophers have collective knowledge of chemistry or access to a laboratory to create products such as nitrogen triiodide. Moreover, my current institution would probably be unlikely to view the gluing of a bull’s penis to a visiting lecturer’s windscreen as a valid political statement, no matter how offensive the lecturer. Whether or not one thinks it could ever be reasonable to consider the use of ruminant genitalia as a tool of free speech, free speech in general, and direct student action specifically, is sadly much less tolerated now than in previous decades.

Conclusion

Philosophers in Aotearoa/New Zealand are not breaking free of the prevailing ideology about women but acting as its most ‘sophisticated defenders’ (Singer, 1976, p. 157). When rational argument is deflected, tactics must change. Historically successful direct actions from the veterinary profession may not be appropriate within today’s political climate, but new battlefields exist in social media. There is more than one way to castrate the bull.

F. J. DALZELL is a practicing veterinary surgeon finishing her PhD in philosophy at the University of Canterbury. Her PhD thesis is arguing animals can be moral agents.

Acknowledgements

I would like to formally acknowledge the support I have received from my fellow PhD student Kara Kennedy, the president of UC FemSoc. She has been an incredible inspiration and a great feminist role model. She has also been a significant practical support in editing and commenting upon this article. I am indebted to my intellectual sisterhood for help with this article.

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Craft as everyday site of assertion: How do artisans talk about gender and skill?

CHANDAN BOSE

Abstract

Voices of assertion and resistance do not necessarily emerge within a defined space and time waiting to be theorised but rather appear and disappear through daily rhythms and routines. Based on ethnographic fieldwork with an artisanal family in the Telangana region of South India, this paper addresses the way in which gender distinctions performed through a craft practice are constructed and subverted within everyday language. By looking at how a craft skill is perceived as a male quality, the objective of this paper is to focus on narratives of women artisans that, on the one hand, re-write such a perception while, on the other, innovatively craft their own *selves* through the practice.

Keywords

Gender, craft, skill, kinship, South Asia

Introduction

One of the most important contributions that post-structuralism of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has made to the social sciences is the appreciation of everyday life and language as critical sites for dissent and assertion (Butler, 1988, 2005; Das, 1995, 2006). In this paper, I claim that practices that regulate and organise identities have the potential to become contexts within which these identities are also challenged. Specifically, I look at the way in which practices of making and crafting objects provide conditions not only for identities of their makers to be established but also for new identities to be asserted. By focusing on everyday narratives of a family of artisans in southern India, this paper attempts two things – one, to demonstrate how the practice of craft unfolds through the performance of gender distinctions, and two, to show that it is within the language of the practice that these distinctions are *taken back*, dismantled, and re-evaluated.

Cheriyal paintings of Telangana



A scroll (in progress) being displayed at a work-shop; photograph by author, December 2012.

Located in Cheriyal (85 km from Hyderabad), a village in the Warangal district of the Indian state of Telangana, is a household of artists who practice the region's style of cloth narrative scroll paintings and doll and mask making. The paintings, rendered in water colours and usually 10–15 meters in length, are known for depicting episodes from the *Purana* (classical genealogical texts) in its characteristic bold style and are produced by a community of hereditary artists called 'naqqashi'.¹

Although the master artist has historically been the patriarch of the household, owing to the several components involved in the production of a scroll and its size, this was and continues to be a practice that requires the participation of the entire household. Women assist after completing their household chores, while children train in the craft after completing their daily and scholastic activities. The stages of production of these images correspond with the stages in training. First, the novice begins by learning how to render

figures; this is followed by acquiring skill in brushwork, which begins with the broad strokes like the red background (a characteristic trait of these paintings), followed by colours for skin and clothes; finally concluding with the finer work such as motifs on clothes, the detailing of jewellery, and the outlining of contours of figures and objects with black ink. The skill and seniority of an artist is judged by the rendition of the final stages, as it requires a level of agility and deftness that is only a product of practice and experience.

In the household under discussion, the eldest member of the household is Danalakota Vaikuntam Naqqash, who lives and works in Cheriyal with his wife, Vanaja, while their two sons, Rakesh and Vinay, are located in Hyderabad pursuing their respective educational



A section of the scroll depicting the legend of the progenitor of the leather-working community of Telangana; photograph by author, November 2013.

degrees. Nageshwar, the son of Vaikuntam's elder and deceased brother, Chandraiah, also lives and practices the craft within the premises of the Danalakota household along with his wife, Padma. Vanaja and Vaikuntam, owing to the lack of space, rent a room that adjoins their home; it is within this space that the couple practice their craft. Padma and Nageshwar, on the other hand, work out of their home, where they convert their living-cum-bedroom into a workplace during the day. It is by focusing on the way in which Vanaja and Padma talk about the organisation of their everyday life around the practice that this paper looks at two specific phenomena: first, one's engagement with the practice is defined by the structural hierarchies of the household within which the practice exists, and second, the practice emerges as a site within which these hierarchies are contested.

Vanaja

Vanaja's initiation into this practice began after her marriage into the Danalakota household. As she recounts,

It was only after my marriage in 1985 that I started doing this work. I began by helping my husband in the work. He initially used to draw the outlines of the figures, and I began colouring them. But it was only after my children grew that I was able to focus on this properly. When my kids started going to school, I had enough time to learn ...

Vanaja's average day begins with cooking the day's meals and washing clothes and utensils; she is usually able to join her husband, Vaikuntam, in the neighbouring studio by 11–11:30 a.m. When Rakesh and Vinay were young, Vanaja used to wrap up work around evening time, when the children came home and she was responsible for supervising their studies and taking care of dinner.

Speaking about the familial and collective nature of the practice, Vaikuntam explained,

Both women and men do the painting together. It is I who usually draws the sketch, the under-drawing. My wife Vanaja then fills the background colour, the colour for skin and clothes. Once she is done, I proceed to do the finer work, like the black outlines. You see women make broad strokes; men make fine strokes. Their work is usually slow, while men's is usually fast. Because women have the added responsibility of nurturing the household – cooking, cleaning, washing – their hands become rough, which makes it difficult to manoeuvre the brush along fine lines.

From the above narrative, it seems that Vaikuntam makes a correlation between Vanaja's participation in the household as a woman and her skill as an artist. 'Broad' and 'fine' strokes then emerge as part of a language that articulates not only aesthetic tenets on which the practice is based but also distinctions through which ideas of self, gender, and personhood are imagined. Speaking about the proliferation in craft production owing to the boost in tourism in Mexico, Quetzil Castaneda (2004) discussed the way in which the peripheral nature of women's participation in what was previously a purely male occupation is 'a function of personal choice



Stages in the production of naqqashi images; photograph by author, November 2012.



added time to master the practice. It's not as if women cannot do this work. We definitely can. But our skill is required to use the brush over larger areas, like the red background and skin and clothes. These portions, which are indispensable for the paintings, are done by us. Without our contribution, it would be impossible to complete a painting.

Through Vanaja's voice, what we see happening is that the naturalisation and actualisation of the gendered conditioning and circumscribing of skill is re-appropriated or *taken back* and written differently. What is perceived through the male voice as the 'peripheral participation' of women is actively constructed by the women as the 'indispensable' aspect of the craft. Vanaja's narrative demonstrates two things. First, the construction of gendered identities is not uncritically received by the practitioners. Vanaja's insistence that 'it is not as if women cannot do this work ... we definitely can' is her way of reiterating that she creates a context within which she not only re-imagines the potential of her skill but also expresses her desire to reclaim that of which she is dispossessed, namely a more agentic capacity within the practice. Second, the language of assertion is generated or emerges within the very system that constructs gender identities. In her ethnography of a temple town in Southern India, Leela Prasad (2007) claimed that norms and regulatory practices require everyday life to exercise their power; however it is owing to its emergent and contextual nature that everyday life also defies the fixity of these

in relation to socioeconomic class and lifestyles' (p. 28). Thus, not only is the craft embodied through a gendered discourse (Maskeill, 1999; Wilkinson-Weber, 1999) but the identity of the 'work' too gets constituted through gendered acts, namely women's work as 'thick' and 'slow' and men's work as 'fine' and 'fast.' Borrowing from feminist philosopher Judith Butler (1988), the 'historical situation' of the master artist being male, with the patriarchal household allowing women's skill to nurture only through *peripheral participation*, has given way to a 'naturalisation' or 'actuality' of the very conditions through which gender is expressed, namely 'their hands become rough.' When I enquired with Vanaja about the nature of her participation in the practice, she said,

Because women have to take care of other household chores, it takes us

practices. Vanaja's insistence that 'without our contribution, it would be impossible to complete a painting' draws our attention to the way in which what is constructed as the elementary structures of a practice, namely the broad strokes for the background, is actively interpreted by Vanaja as the centre around which the craft is moulded. Thus, by virtue of being embedded in everyday life, a singular narrative of the practice of the craft is confronted with a plurality of texts that are co-authored by subjects.

Padma

Like Vanaja and Vaikuntam, Padma and Nageshwar also practice the craft from the proximity of their home. However, apart from supplying craft objects to state-run retail outlets, a significant amount of their time is also spent in traveling for and participating in domestic and international exhibitions and programmes. The participation of craftspeople in such programmes outside their 'locale' has a significant history in colonial and post-independent India. Carol Breckenridge (1989) and Saloni Mathur (2000) throw light on the way in which 'world fairs' of the nineteenth century were instrumental in furthering the colonial agenda of defining the Indian subcontinent as traditional and timeless. David Harvey (2005), on the other hand, proposed that contemporary practices such as craft exhibitions and demonstrations highlight neo-liberal market principles of the nation-state, which are driven towards a public consumption of heritage.

Padma and Nageshwar have attended various such exhibitions as part of the nation-state's agenda to promote the crafts of the Telangana region. Nageshwar narrated to me an experience of one such exhibition:

We have travelled to many big cities around the world exhibiting our work – New Delhi, Hong Kong. Last year we went to Berlin. That was memorable. But because Padma knows very little Hindi and almost no English, she is usually quiet. I do most of the talking with customers. She knows a lot about the craft, but finds it difficult to express herself. Berlin was very cold when we visited. Padma didn't enjoy herself.

The home and studio space were not just a convenient and comfortable space for artisans such as Padma but were also her centre from where she could be more productive and operational, or what William Housley (n.d.) called her 'most potent environment' (p. 22). That home-cum-studio was in a way her 'most familiar space' from where Padma believed she could explore her potentials to the best of her abilities.

Padma's 'silence' that Nageshwar talks about refers to her dislocation from everyday structures and life worlds around which she functions best. It is not just a matter of de-contextualisation *vis-a-vis* the unfamiliar space of the exhibition but as an actual alienation from their materials and the environments within which they are optimally utilised.

However, what I discovered subverting this narrative of the 'silent artisan' was not a *voice* but something that was represented in the medium most familiar to the artist. One day while sharing with me her scrapbook, Padma stumbled upon a sketch (p. 86) she had made of herself during a craft workshop she attended in New Delhi a few years ago, where she was accompanied by other women artisans from India.

The sketch made her giggle. This is what she said:

(Laughing) This is me and Medhavi, the trainer in our workshop. We were asked to paint our impression of the workshop ... This was the day when they trained us in colour mixing and shading. Even the date is here ... see, 9 April 2012. I really enjoyed that workshop. There were several women like me who belonged to other craft communities.

The image at first sight is rather direct and uncomplicated. Padma is seated, wearing a sari, and



Sketch by Padma; photograph by author; September 2013.

handing over what seems to be a shade-card to Medhavi, who is shown wearing a singlet and pants, which could be Padma's *impression* of her. However, if one supplements this image with Padma's referral to the figure in the *sari* as 'this is me ...' what emerges is a rather powerful account that Padma gives of herself.

Curator and art historian Sharyn Udall (2003), in her study of the way in which Frida Kahlo converted her own persona into an 'image' in two of her portraits, *Time Flies* (1929) and *Broken Column* (1944), offered an insight into the way in which Padma, through her drawn self, is 'trying on identities, both personal and artistic' (p. 10). The image is encoded in Padma's biographical self; she gives an account of herself, unlike Nageshwar's claim that she 'finds it difficult to express herself.' In the act of making an image of herself, Padma then takes ownership over her constitution. In fact, Padma is writing her *self* in the language that

is most familiar to her, namely her skill and style of image making. Thus, in a sense, she uses her skill to transcend an acquired identity that is implicitly tied to this skill, moving from *being a traditional craftsperson within an artisanal family* to *being me*.

Further, one also notices the rather amiable way in which Padma recalls her experience of the workshop in New Delhi compared with the near isolation she endured during her trip to Germany. The workshop involved women from different states of India, who Padma refers to as 'women artists like me.' She establishes a continuity of identity with these women, who *like her* belong to different artistic practices, and who *like her* have been dislocated from their own contexts. In his lucid and sublime analysis of the medieval Sanskrit tale *Nala-Damayanti* around the theme of memory and recovery of the self, David Shulman (2001) claimed that the dislocation or dis-alignment experienced by the self creates the conditions for *self-doubt* or *loss of the self*. It is then within the act of seeing and listening under this condition that perception causes a space to open up, which is bridged by a movement undertaken by *remembering* – a movement from *forgetting* to *awareness*. This movement through remembrance is what then gives way to re-alignment (Shulman, 2001). It is the way in which Padma perceived the women present at the workshop – through their *shared practice* and *shared dislocation* – that she recognises her *self* emerging from the likeness that she forges with these women. Padma's sketch, I believe, recalls for her that movement towards recognition, which Butler (2005) reminded us, is not about asking "what we are", as if the task were simply to fill in the content of our personhood ... (but) "what can I become?" (p. 24).

Conclusion

Over the course of this paper, I have tried to demonstrate, on the one hand, contexts within which gender identities are narrated, and on the other, how these narratives are re-evaluated within the lived reality of craft. I claim that this re-evaluation emerges within the critical

language that subjects such as Vanaja and Padma assemble together using the very structures within which their gender identities are constructed. Vanaja, on the one hand, interprets the aesthetic discourse of the craft, whereby what is *written* as *peripheral participation* is *read* as *indispensable*. Padma, on the other, transforms the practice – from being a site upon which her identity as a craftsperson is constructed, to evolving it into a language through which she authors her *self*.

Dissent – as challenging established forms of thinking – and assertion – as weaving new narratives – does not always constitute a definable object of study; nor is it contained in a recognisable form everywhere waiting to be explored by the social scientist. Rather, one begins to read dissent and assertion as moments within the everyday life of the structures that come to frame normative understanding of ‘how things must be.’ As a focus of study, everyday life then not only provides a more complex understanding of a practice but can also narrate ways in which the relationships and languages that it embeds become sites for artists such as Vanaja and Padma to express their capacity to imagine and act on those possibilities.

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Notes

1. All images of artworks in this article are used with the permission of the artists.

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Intersectional poetry: Spoken poetry as a platform for feminist thought free from tone policing

KYRA GILLIES

Abstract

Marginalised groups often experience silencing through language and tone policing. For example, those speaking out against gendered and racialised violence may be told they are ‘too angry.’ This paper suggests spoken poetry is an impactful platform for feminist thought as it can be free from sexist, racist, classist, and ableist language and tone policing that individuals often encounter in academia or in informal social settings. This paper was delivered at the third annual UC FemSoc conference predominantly through performance poetry to demonstrate the power and potential for poetry to overcome and disrupt silencing of marginalised voices. As the poems performed are spoken poems (poems written to be heard and seen), the page does not do them justice. However, I have included the transcript of two poems, *New Zealand* and *How we learn to hate (This is not an apology)*, that were performed at the conference to give an idea of the content and potential.

Keywords

Language policing, tone policing, marginalised groups, systemic oppression, poetry

Transcript of talk preceding poetry performance

Spoken poetry is an excellent platform for expressing intersectional feminist thought. Raising your voice and being heard is extremely important, especially for people who are trying to speak out against systemic oppression that they and/or others experience. Aside from risk of death or extreme bodily harm, two things pose significant risks to marginalised groups being heard: language policing and tone policing. Language policing is about asserting rules or control over the word choice and terms that someone uses and using this as a reason to not listen to the vocal party. Tone policing is about insisting on not listening to someone based on them expressing their fear, anger, or frustration about something. Those who speak out against sexual assault and harassment are familiar with being told that people *would* listen to them if they did not sound so angry and like they hated men. A similar pattern emerges for those who speak out against racial oppression or the combined racist and sexist oppression that Black women experience, known as misogynoir (Bristol, 2014). I believe we should listen to people who have experienced harm from an oppressive system and not use their anger or hurt as an excuse not to listen to them.

Language policing and tone policing are often sexist, classist, ableist, and racist. Expecting people to conform to a particular standard of expressing one’s feelings and ideas can function to silence already marginalised groups. Expecting everyone to deliver their thoughts in a dignified, non-emotional, academic way can force people to water down their argument by ridding it of their personal experience and frustrations. Alternatively, these expectations may require people to jump through a hoop they may not be capable of jumping through, particularly for people with learning disabilities or who are neurodivergent. In doing so, this also prioritises masculine, highly educated, ‘rational’, detached ways of talking, which reinforce the status quo of inequalities experienced under colonial White-supremacist cis-hetero-patriarchal capitalism. Expecting people to talk in a particular way can also exclude those of lower classes, who do not have access to higher education, thus disproportionately excluding people of colour as they are more likely to be lower class. It can exclude feminine people who may say ‘like’ and ‘um’ frequently and use vocal variety such as vocal fry and uptalk. Vocal fry is when one’s voice

goes gravelly and lower at the end of a sentence or word (Friedman, 2015). Uptalk is raising one's voice at the end of a declarative sentence. Linguists have noted that male and female people use uptalk in equal measure, but it seems only female people are dismissed for not talking seriously enough (Watanabe, 2015). Expecting all people to conform to one particular standard of talking can also exclude people who use slang that is particular to their culture, particularly those who are from a non-White culture and/or a lower class background.

It is one thing to experience systemic oppression, but to be told you should not sound so whiny or angry when you talk about your experience is a whole other form of additional frustrating and hurtful oppression. The bottom line is people are allowed to be angry and hurt, and they deserve to be listened to.

Spoken poetry is a platform in which individuals can express their experiences and their world views free from often sexist, ableist, racist, and classist language and tone policing. Although the medium will never be entirely free of these things, it has the potential to be more free than other more formalised areas that privilege particular ways of presenting ideas because of the 'in-built' freedom wherein people are encouraged to speak from experience and use their own style and word choice. Spoken poetry is an opportunity for people of all backgrounds and identities to raise their voice about their personal experiences and their understanding of people and social systems. In spoken poetry, anger, hurt, joy, and all kinds of emotion have a place and are enthusiastically welcomed. 'Like', 'um', uptalk, and other slang are understood as an artistic and acutely aware choice of the speaker rather than dismissed as a sign of a lack of intelligence or confidence. Essentially, what makes spoken poetry such an excellent platform is that it is a form where people can speak their truth without having someone tell them 'it was good but you should swear less because it's not ladylike' or 'say um less because it makes you sound unsure of yourself' or 'use language of higher calibre because otherwise you don't sound as if you know what you're talking about.'

To me, spoken poetry can be a way of saying a big 'fuck you' to the people and systems who try to silence people talking about their experiences by using their word choice or delivery style as an excuse not to listen to people. The way people talk is not the problem – the problem is others not listening to them.

Transcript of a poem performed at the FemSoc conference

The following poems, *New Zealand* and *How we learn to hate (This is not an apology)*, are transcripts of two of the poems I performed at the FemSoc conference in Canterbury. While the poems were written to be heard live, I hope the transcripts will give a sense of how spoken poetry can be a very powerful and free medium.

For consideration of those who have experienced trauma, here is a 'content forecast' for sensitive, potentially triggering content (Stringer, 2016). In the first poem, *New Zealand*, there are mentions and slight discussions of the following: transphobia, state violence, racism, sexism, domestic violence, rape of trans women, suicide, and self-harm allusions.

New Zealand is a poem in which I reflect on the shattering of my view of New Zealand as a great eco-friendly and equal country. This is me trying to process my disillusionment and to decry the numerous and growing social inequalities in this country.

The second poem, *How we learn to hate (This is not an apology)*, chronicles my own socialisation into Whiteness and anti-Māori racism as a Pākehā person in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The poem contains mentions and discussions of racism, mass incarceration, and racist state apparatus.

New Zealand

New Zealand, I thought you were a clean and green country.
But you raise cattle on colonised land to shit in the rivers,
and then wonder why people are sick?
It's not a hard matter to figure out.
It's a simple matter. It's fecal matter.

New Zealand, I watched a police officer throw a brown boy off his bike,
and still the spokesperson says
'they are investigating and cannot at this time comment on the matter'.
New Zealand, you can't just steal land and commit genocide,
let some time pass and then act like you don't continue to benefit from what you did.
And that others aren't still crushed under the foot of colonisation.
New Zealand, when will you realise you are racist?
Will it be once Māori have the highest suicide rate and lowest employment rate?
Those things are already true so why won't you see?
How convenient it is to not look at things ...

New Zealand, we filmed Lord of the Rings here for the beauty of the land but right now the only similarity
is that the NSA are watching us like the eye of Sauron.
And I wish there was a ring I could chuck in a volcano to fix things.
A politician to chuck in a volcano to fix things.
But I know it's systemic.

New Zealand, I thought this was a good country,
but we've got people living in cars and garages,
and the government is busy debating if that meets the definition of homelessness or not.
Never mind the 40,000 people who for them homelessness is not an abstract concept.

We've got some of the highest rates of domestic violence in the developed world.
And hey! At least something is looking up,
our gender pay gap rose from 9 to 14% last year.
It's one thing to have your labour exploited under capitalism,
but to get paid less for it too.
Talk about cherry on top!

Transgender people can't get legally recognised until they can afford and access 'the surgery.'
And if that sounds unfair already, just wait until you hear the punchline!
There's no surgeons in the whole fucking country, the waitlist is 50 years long,
and if they don't get 'the surgery',
which they inevitably can't,
their identity is not seen as legitimate.
So they get put in the wrong prison,
with double bunking
and get raped.

The recipe for oppression was followed perfectly.
2 cups of state violence.
A pinch of colonisation.
A tablespoon and a half of racial bias.
100 grams of transphobia.
Combine and bake.
And then New Zealand is all like why is there an oppression cake?
I don't remember making this?
New Zealand, throw out your goddamn recipe book!

New Zealand, Māori women make up over half the prison population.
You are not an equal country.
Mental health cuts are making us bleed.
I watched a sobbing, elderly woman,
trembling, barely able to stand,
forced to wait behind a red line to be seen at the public hospital.

New Zealand, so proud of our Springbok Tour protests,
our Rainbow Warrior no-nukes-here protests,
but in the same breath will spit on climate and TPPA activists who are fighting for the same thing,
it's called justice?
That might be confusing to you cuz I know your justice system is fucked, New Zealand.

But hey! It's not all bad. It's not aaaall bad.
I mean I am focusing on the negatives aren't I, New Zealand?
I should lighten up, relax, crack open a beer,
watch a rugby game or drink drive,
whatever it is New Zealanders do.
I should focus on the positives!
Look at all the medals we won at the Olympics, did you see that?
And we were the first country to 'give' our women the vote,
(as if they didn't fight for it).

These negatives have death tolls, New Zealand.
And I will speak on them until my lungs give out.
People are dying,
getting sick,
getting left behind.
People are killing themselves, New Zealand,
but still you want to cut their lifeline.
The only suicide phone support line we have.
And the funding is about to be pulled out from underneath us.
New Zealand, this is very serious.
I feel like you're the one pushing the knife to our veins,
but in the other hand are ready to sweep us under the rug.

New Zealand, I'd leave if my student debt didn't shackle me here.
I'd leave if there was somewhere better to go.
I'd leave if there weren't so many people I love who I couldn't bear to leave behind.
So New Zealand, you best get used to hearing people like me talk,
cuz we've got a lot more to say and we're not going anywhere.

How we learn to hate (This is not an apology)

E noho, e tū.
In kindergarten learning new words was fun.
They sounded different. Nice.

Mā, whero, kākāriki, kōwhai, pango.
In primary school
My teachers taught us colours in te reo,
I remember the words.
Lovely words.
But I remember the resentment too.
The way they would angrily rush this part of class to move on to the "important stuff."
I didn't know why my leaders had disgust for this beautiful language.
But I followed them like a good Christian school girl, hands behind my back.

Haka

In intermediate we learnt the haka. And we resented it like we were taught.

At high school all the kids were saying what the teachers were saying.
It's unfair that all these Mowree kids get the scholarships.
Knowing nothing about it,
Except that that's what everyone around me was saying.
I found myself saying it too.
Unthinkingly. "Yeah that is unfair!"

Kumara

At home I found myself eating kumara, but being sure to call it sweet potato.

Taro

At the supermarket I looked excitedly at this new thing taro,
and asked if we could get it.
My mum told me "no it's a gross vegetable that those islanders eat"

Hāngi

At school we were going to have a hāngi,
I was excited this sounded new and clever.
A family member quickly swooped down and told me that it's a gross Mowree way of cooking. Unhygienic.
So I didn't look forward to it anymore.

I kept hearing that Māori are lazy, they don't look after their kids. Always boozing and fighting and living off the dole.
And without knowing anyone like this,
Or any Māori people at all.
I believed it.
These were authoritative people, telling me this, they know what they're talking about.
And apart from this hate that seeped from their mouths, they were kind people.

I look on TV and see there is a channel just for Māori.
I conclude this is unfair.
Mistaking all the other channels, the white channels for neutral somehow.
And this. This Mowree television. Must truly be an injustice.

I watch Police ten 7. Every time a brown man commits a crime they are sure to diligently mention that he is a Māori man he is a Pasifika man. As if their brownness is the cause.
And I believe it.

I began working in a retail store,
And all the senior employees would earnestly remind me to be watchful of "those young girls" who steal make up.
And every time they reminded me, they were pointing at a young brown girl.
And I didn't say anything.
Not the first time they pointed "those girls" out
And not when the pattern emerged.

The rugby is on. The All Blacks are playing.
My father comments that this is what them brown folk are good at cuz they're not so smart.
I think of the Māori boys at my school, good at rugby.
Not doing so well in class.
Knowing nothing of the unequal system they live in,
this seems to be true.
They are simply, naturally more suited,
to the physical realm.

Tino rangatiratanga
Māori sovereignty. How inadequate it is to have just learnt what this means only a couple of months ago.
Social, political, cultural, liberty.

Takatāpui
I presumed Māori society was as heteronormative as ours until I came across the word takatāpui.
I was convinced that homophobia was somehow precolonial.
That Mowrees were just as hateful as us.
I couldn't imagine them excelling at something.
We'd barely just got same sex marriage legalised.
How could they have been ahead of us?

Te awa atua.
The river of menstrual blood.
I was convinced that disgust and stigma of menstruation was across all cultures.
Then I found out about the goddess Atua.
The songs the ceremonies.
Rituals and reverence.
And I realised hate comes from my culture.
Misogyny is part of white culture.

While I had been taught to think that the white world
is the most advanced.
The bestest
Most superiorest.
I had been misled.
That is not to shirk responsibility for I did follow,
the example set for me.
But it is to explain how this happens.
A system made up of individuals.
Upheld by a collection of individuals who participate.
Our racial system is passed down.
Both learnt and taught,
In order to be maintained.
I'm sick of helping to uphold these oppressive beams.
White supremacy is not a structure that deserves to stay standing.

This is not an apology. Cuz I know words can ring very hollow,
For example, biculturalism.
Can you use it in a sentence?
New Zealand is a bicultural country.
As if we are two cultures living side by side as equals.
As if the 58% of Māori women who make up the majority of the female prison population have been
treated equally.
This is not an apology because that would not be enough.
This is a pledge to do so much better.

I hope the transcripts of these two poems that were performed to an audience at the conference
illuminate further the power of poetry for expression and social change.

A note on poetry performance and audience participation

Those who have seen spoken poetry for the first time will likely notice the way in which
audience involvement sets this form apart. Audiences are often encouraged to click their
fingers if they 'feel' or appreciate what the poet has said. As long as noise from the audience

does not drown out the poet, real-time responses of grunting or clicking to express appreciation or understanding are welcomed. In this sense, spoken poetry can be a liberating experience for audience members too, as they are not expected to sit quietly and wait until after to share their feelings.

KYRA GILLIES is a third-year gender studies and English student at the University of Otago and a spoken poet. Kyra had their first spoken poetry show, Pissed off! Passionate and hopeful, in the 2017 Dunedin Fringe Festival. The show was nominated for Best Visual and Performance Art and Kyra was nominated for Best Emerging Artist.

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Why women should be editing Wikipedia

KARA KENNEDY

Abstract

The world's sixth most visited website, Wikipedia, is in desperate need of more diversity and contributions from women as well as from ethnic minorities and people from non-Western countries. This article offers an overview of how the site arrived at this point, why the lack of diversity is an important issue, what is currently being done about it, and what practical steps teachers, students, and the general public can take to encourage more women to contribute to Wikipedia.

Keywords

Wikipedia, feminism, women, gender gap, diversity

Introduction

Since Wikipedia's founding in 2001, millions of people have come to rely on it for information on a range of topics, despite the fact it is neither stable nor peer-reviewed in the traditional academic sense. It operates on the seemingly radical notion that anyone should be able to contribute to building a free encyclopaedia. Yet, in practice, this has resulted in a small, largely male and Western group being in charge of curation, with less than one fifth of editors identifying as women (Hill & Shaw, 2013; Wikimedia, 2011). Although the gender gap has received some media attention, many users of the site may be unaware of or unconcerned about the lack of diversity and how it affects what they accept as factual. If knowledge is power, people need to be made aware of who takes responsibility for editing the majority of the content and what kinds of biases this group tends to perpetuate. One of the dangers of easy access to information on the site is that if there is no article about something, people may think it does not exist or is unimportant. Women and their contributions to history and society need

to be made visible as part of a continuing feminist project, and women should be encouraged to edit Wikipedia to ensure their voices and perspectives are included.

A brief history of Wikipedia

According to Simonite (2013), Wikipedia was launched by Jimmy Wales, a financial trader, and Larry Sanger, a new philosophy PhD. It was actually initiated to help boost Nupedia, which Wales had started as an online encyclopaedia created by experts, but Nupedia had a lengthy review process and never got off the ground. Meanwhile, people enthusiastically started editing Wikipedia, so Wales and Sanger made that their focus. The goal was to ‘compile the sum of all human knowledge’ and encourage collaboration for the greater good (Simonite, 2013, para. 2). Articles were supposed to be authoritative, comprehensive, and unbiased. In a few years, the English-language Wikipedia had over 750,000 entries. But the volunteer workforce of established editors was feeling overwhelmed by the number of new editors and contributions and finding it hard to control vandalism and incorrect information. So they started making it easier to police content, making a one-button reject option as well as bots, which are autonomous computer programmes that perform edits with little or no human intervention. This did help control vandalism and hoaxes, but it has led to a very bureaucratic and hostile environment. Now, new editors are more likely to have their work removed, and many stop contributing as a result. One study has found that new editors are generally likely to find their newly created articles deleted faster than they can contribute to them (Halfaker, Geiger, Morgan & Riedl, 2012). Furthermore, newcomers are often welcomed or talked to, not by humans, but by bots and algorithm tools that put up warning messages or reject their edits. This represents a ‘shift from human, personal interaction to mechanical, impersonal interaction’ (Halfaker et al., 2012, p. 681). There are also more informal norms and rules being created that make it difficult for new editors to figure out how to contribute successfully. As Halfaker et al. (2012, p. 683) stated, ‘Wikipedia has changed from the encyclopaedia that anyone can edit to the encyclopaedia that anyone who understands the norms, socialises himself or herself, dodges the impersonal wall of semi-automated rejection, and still wants to voluntarily contribute his or her time and energy can edit.’ Indeed, the number of active editors started in the hundreds in 2001, went to the thousands in 2004, and peaked in 2007 at 56,400 (Halfaker et al., 2012, p. 665). It has been declining ever since, down to 31,000 in 2013 (Simonite, 2013, para. 12).

A decline in active editors is not the only problem. In terms of article quality, only 0.362% of articles are rated as ‘good’ quality according to Wikipedia’s own standards (Halfaker et al., 2012, p. 665). Coverage is also skewed, because editors tend to spend more time on issues they care about and less time on others that may need attention. Wikipedia’s popularity and the fact it is free has devalued competitors like *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and prompted some libraries to discontinue purchasing subscriptions to them, meaning there are fewer alternatives to turn to.

Lack of diversity

Those concerned about accurate, less biased information being made available on a variety of topics should care about the state of Wikipedia because it has become a major player in the world of information. It is the sixth most visited website in the world, with an estimated 475 million unique monthly visitors (eBizMBA, 2017). In addition, the most visited website, Google, pulls Wikipedia content into its fact boxes during searches and presents the information as authoritative, giving it additional credibility. From 2014 to the present day, Wikipedia grew from around 33 million articles (Adams, 2014) to over 44 million articles in over 280 languages

(Wikimedia, 2017). Millions of people rely on it for information, from teaching to research to general facts and history. But whenever people use Wikipedia, they are accepting information that has not gone through the same scholarly review process as in previous encyclopaedias. They are relying on a combination of computer algorithms, informal guidelines, and potentially biased perspectives to present information to them.

Studies on the lack of diversity among Wikipedia editors are varied because it is difficult to track the demographics of editors/contributors, and researchers have found methodological issues with the opt-in surveys conducted by UNU-MERIT (2010) and Wikimedia (2011) showing the percentage of editors who identify as women to be between 8.5% and 12.6%. However, even in Hill and Shaw's (2013) revised estimate of the gender gap, the percentage of women editors was 16.1%, and of experienced editors with more than 500 edits, it dropped to around 6% (Lam et al., 2011). The UNU-MERIT survey of 54,034 self-reported contributors revealed that around 50% identified themselves as being aged 22 or under, around 45% had a secondary degree or lower (meaning high school, A-levels, or equivalent), 67% had no partner, and 85% had no children (UNU-MERIT, 2010). This paints a picture of young men without college degrees or families dominating the editorship of the site. The Wikimedia survey largely confirmed these trends, although the age brackets used differed and cannot be compared as easily with those in the previous survey. Of the editors, 27% identified as being aged 12–21 years, 26% were aged 22–29 years, and 39% had a secondary degree or lower (Wikimedia, 2011). In its report about the survey results, Wikimedia was careful to dispel the stereotype or 'caricatured profile of Wikipedia editors' as 'a male graduate student who programs, supports open source, plays massively multiplayer online games, and lives in the USA or Europe.' Instead, it put forth a slightly different, albeit still very limited, profile:

According to the data, if there is a typical Wikipedia editor, he has a college degree, is 30-years-old, is computer savvy but not necessarily a programmer, doesn't actually spend much time playing games, and lives in US or Europe. (Wikimedia, 2011)

The report also acknowledged that, to grow the Wikipedia community, it needed to add more diversity and sensitivity to gender, culture, and other differences.

Knowing who is behind a large amount of the information on Wikipedia makes it clear that there is a large demographic disparity. But, as stated by Sarah Stierch, a woman who worked for a year at the Wikimedia Foundation to improve the site's friendliness toward women, 'When White men have been editing history since day one, they don't see this as a problem' (Paling, 2015, para. 24). Indeed, articles of particular interest to women are shorter than articles of interest to men (Halfaker et al., 2012). This can be seen through comparisons of the coverage of prominent female and male philosophers, such as Julia Kristeva versus Michel Foucault, or an analysis of the gender balance on Wikipedia's front page, with RMJ stating that 'nine men to every one woman on a portal that represents the greatest easily accessible store of knowledge is outrageously disproportionate and unacceptable' (cited in Reagle & Rhue, 2011, p. 1141).

Several reasons have been put forth as to why women do not contribute Wikipedia content, despite the ability to be gender anonymous. Collier and Bear (2012) hypothesised that there may be significant issues with three 'C's: conflict, confidence in expertise, and criticism of others, as well as a lack of discretionary time. Regarding conflict, various problems such as trolling and other assaultive or competitive behaviour mean that women are more likely to want to avoid an unsafe online environment (Collier & Bear, 2012). Women also lack confidence, being 43% more likely than men not to contribute because they do not think they have enough knowledge or expertise (Collier & Bear, 2012). In terms of criticism, 34% of women are more likely not to contribute because they do not feel comfortable editing other people's work (Collier & Bear, 2012).

Addressing the gap

Addressing these and other issues, then, becomes necessary to make women feel welcome and increase their likelihood of editing and contributing to Wikipedia. Wikimedia is the non-profit foundation that pays for Wikipedia's infrastructure, and it has been gradually trying to encourage more female editors. Its Inspire campaign provided \$250,000 (USD) in grants for editor meetups with childcare and workshops to increase awareness about sexism on the site (Paling, 2015). But how much, if at all, this campaign will actually close the gender gap is unclear. Meanwhile, several WikiProjects are trying to improve the number and quality of articles on women, feminism, and gender studies. These include *WikiProject women*, *WikiProject feminism*, *WikiProject gender studies*, and the *WikiProject countering systemic bias/gender gap task force*. Their pages have lists of to-dos, such as articles that need to be checked and calls for experts to contribute to certain articles. In addition, the FemTechNet (2017) network has organised 'wikistorming' projects to add feminist scholarship to the site and encourage contributions from feminists, academics, and activists. One obstacle for students, in particular, is that academia has been hostile toward Wikipedia from the start, so most students are discouraged from using the site (even though everyone knows they do), let alone contributing to it. Consequently, they must learn the rules of the game on their own, without guidance or support.

But, as with similar initiatives to get more women into STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields, simply adding more women will not necessarily address all of the issues of bias on Wikipedia. If the percentage of women editors continues to remain low, it will be difficult to change the culture. As in other places, there needs to be a critical mass of women to actually make changes and be more than token voices that can easily be dismissed. There are also other issues of diversity to be considered, including a lack of contributors from ethnic minorities and countries where English is not the main language. With almost half of Wikipedia's editors coming from only five countries – United States, Germany, Russia, UK, and Italy – their nationalities and information sources inevitably shape their perspectives on the content they edit (Wikimedia, 2011). A project called *WikiAfrica* was launched in 2013 to try to 'Africanise' the site and have entries about Africa created by Africans rather than Europeans or Americans (Goko, 2013). The project's initiators recognised that Europeans and Americans tend to write entries based on information from the media they consume, which often perpetuates a negative image of Africa and its people. They see this project as one of the best ways of promoting themselves and their culture to a worldwide audience and adding a balanced perspective to articles relating to Africa.

Practical steps

Those who wish to see more diversity on Wikipedia must think carefully about what kind of representation they would like and how to get there. Although the site brands itself as the encyclopaedia that anyone can edit, many potential editors may need support and encouragement before they are willing to take that step. In a blog post entitled *Unlocking the clubhouse: Five ways to encourage women to edit Wikipedia*, then-executive director of the Wikimedia Foundation, Sue Gardner (2010), applied some of the lessons found in *Unlocking the clubhouse* – a book about the gender gap in computing – to the gender gap at Wikipedia. Her suggestions included the following:

- Deliberately focus efforts on recruiting women. Do not assume that general outreach efforts will motivate women. Encourage women to recruit other women.
- Stage and support women-only activities.
- Do not get dissuaded by opposition.
- Work to create and protect a female-friendly environment.
- Emphasise social impact.

These steps can also be adjusted to apply to other marginalised groups. In addition, Collier and Bear (2012) made several recommendations based on their aforementioned study of the issues of conflict, confidence, and criticism. They said that women should not tolerate the culture of conflict that men dismiss as just being competitive or sarcastic. Wikipedia and its contributors should encourage positive feedback (likes) rather than deletions, invite people to contribute, and make them feel wanted. Women generally prefer collaboration to competition and criticism, they noted, so it would be a good idea to let contributors interact and get to know one another before they collaborate on editing an article.

Some practical steps that can be taken to address the gender gap and lack of diversity on Wikipedia include making it political, raising awareness, and asking that wiki editing be incorporated into the educational sphere. Making the issue of Wikipedia's gender gap political means telling others why they should care about it: Because millions are relying on information curated by a small, male-dominated, unrepresentative fraction of the world's population. It means warning others about bias, especially when someone attempts to present information from the site as objective. The general public have misconceptions; for example, they may believe that someone is in charge, making sure that everything on the site is double-checked and factual. Raising awareness also means recruiting new editors by hosting local edit-a-thons, as many groups worldwide have already done. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Dowse Art Museum (2015) has run edit-a-thons to improve Wikipedia's coverage of local female artists, including an event focused on Māori and Pacific artists. With regards to education, for too long institutions of learning have eschewed Wikipedia, ignoring the reality that millions of people, including teachers and students, rely on the site for knowledge about the world. In actuality, the collaborative wiki format can be used as a powerful teaching tool with a variety of benefits: It allows students to contribute to public scholarship from which potentially millions will benefit, it encourages them to be more critically aware of crowd-sourced projects and information sites such as Wikipedia, and it teaches them valuable digital literacy skills for a twenty-first-century world. Several files are available through Wikimedia (2012) on how teachers can use Wikipedia as a teaching tool, complete with a sample rubric.

Contributing to and editing articles on Wikipedia can range from simply fixing poor wording or adding references, to revising mistakes or biased content, all the way to creating new articles. In an increasingly digital age, the power to shape others' perspectives is at one's fingertips. With relatively few barriers to entry, Wikipedia ultimately represents a fruitful opportunity for those whose voices have often been marginalised to contribute their expertise to a worldwide audience.

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