1. A vignette or anecdote from your work or from existing literature that illustrates your opinion on the purchase or challenge of a feminist approach.
2. Three (3) or more relevant references annotated to generate discussion on feminist approaches in CSCW.
3. Author biography including current research or potential goals of research.

Vignette or Anecdote

Implicit and Explicit Transference of Gender Normativity in Collaborative Software

The gender binary, codified into any software, can be thought to regulate and normalise social life, and in the case of collaborative software like Wikipedia, the argument is particularly visible. Depending on the design, users of collaborative software have varying degrees of control over the very structure of the systems as well as over content. Peer productions systems in the open source and free culture vein tend to offer greater ontological freedom and prescribe less what ought to be done with the tools. Thus the actions taken by users in free culture more directly shed light on technological determinism.

Wikipedia is lauded as a vanguard example quality through collaboration, but is has also been shown not to fully escape gender discrimination in biographical coverage seen in other reference works (Eom et al. 2014). Investigations between the many language editions of Wikipedia have linked language edition biases to gender biases in biographies (Reagle, Rhue 2010). Counterpart to this, studies of editor behaviour have shown an entrenching of gender biases among users (Lam et al. 2011). These proven connections between representation in who edits, and the language of the edits are some of the effects that inform my personal practice of collaborating on Wikipedia.

I was among the first, but not the very first contributors who were setting up the gender *property* in Wikidata, the database of facts that feeds Wikipedia. A quick technical primer to Wikidata: *items* have *properties* which take *values*. For example: *item (*Earth), *property (*highest point), *value (*Mount Everest). Very optionally one can put *constraints* on values, but there is no requirement to do so. There main problem I saw in the early ideological formation of the gender property was that it was constrained so that the *value* "should be one of 'male', 'female', or 'intersex'"[1]. Wikidata had only very recently been a blank slate and users were literally coding the gender binary (perhaps trinary) as a logical constraint into the software.

Bringing this to the attention of gender-gap-aware Wikimedians, several allies jumped into the conversation and ultimately argued successfully for allowing identities outside the gender binary. A year later observational research about the state of Wikidata shows there are 9 different recorded genders, although the idea of constraining the property to a finite set of values remains.

The qualified success highlights the hope that Wiki-like sociotechnical systems can change to fit the mentalities of its users because users are also editors and design-choice makers. That self-determination is precisely the illuminating factor of how software reinforces philosophy. Top-down collaborative software, like those of social networking or dating sites, may have the same coding of gender, but because the conversations about gender–or lack thereof–are more hidden the transference of gender normativity through the software passes more silently. When a group of volunteers decree on a web page the limits of gender, although it might be same as the top-down decree, we see people with no more power than ourselves making a decision which will shape the system.

In the computer-supported collaboration step of users determining their own framework, the social

---

1   https://www.wikidata.org/w/index.php?title=Property:P21&oldid=5914065

evolution of the concept of gender is more evident. With the creation of the gender property on Wikidata, we see an example of users grappling with how to translate gender into code. As social computing systems transfer mindsets into technology the more control the user has of the software, the more obviated the ramifications will be.

Annotated References

1. ["Interactions of cultures and top people of Wikipedia from ranking of 24 language editions"](#) (Eom et al. 2014)

    • On gender, their results indicate 10.1% of the top 100 most networked Wikipedia articles are women. This reported figure is more severe than the overlap with any single language, so the authors show some "[un]wisdom of the crowds" effect.

    • The final analysis tries to quantify cultural influence. A "network of cultures" is made, where nodes are each of the 24 languages-cum-cultures, and the directed, weighted edges are the number of foreigners in their top 100. For instance, in the English Wikipedia's top 100, five people were born in France; so England connects to France with a weight of 5. English and German are shown as top and runner-up, respectively.

  • So a real question is, does decreasing other biases – like language – decrease gender bias?

2. [Gender Bias in Wikipedia and Britannica](#) (Reagle, Rhue 2010)
    • This paper investigates differences between Wikipedia and Britannica in their coverage of female biographies.
    • The literature review is very complete and provides a rich historical background for feminist criticism on reference works dating back as far as 1604. The paper is solidly situated in showing Wikipedia as heir apparent to in the reference works game, but questioning what it does to address a now 500 year old problem.
    • The overarching points that I take away are that our reference works are even more sexist that other journalism (16% women versus 28% at extremes in Biographical dictionaries).
  • A question that arises from the rich historical context given here is, what are good baselines to use for comparing gender gaps? Is the 'pop' notion of 50/50 (or 49/49/1) adequate without proof? The citable history of at best 72/28 does not seem informative. Is there an alternative more provable way? Does this point need to be proved at all?

3. [WP:Clubhouse? An Exploration of Wikipedia's Gender Imbalance](#) (Lam et al.)
    • The paper shows that women and men are blocked from editing the same amount, but women more likely to be blocked indefinitely. So despite the literature that men "act-out" more, either the data is too limited, or Wikipedia is a different interaction ground.
  • Considering that being blocked is a very definite exclusion event, can we further study the importance of female exclusion in sociotechnical systems is through technical events like blocking and social events like bad communication?
  • [Update: [See recent Arbitration between Wikipedia editors where disrupting male editor was](#)

temporary blocked, but reaction female editor was indefinitely blocked.]

Author Biography

Max Klein comes from the Hacker scene writing open source software, and collaborating on research with academic partners. His current project is called "WIGI" the Wikipedia Gender Inequality Index. It is based off of a hack he performed in 2013; he was the first to look at the female percentage of representation across all Wikipedia languages. Now he's expanding this concept to investigate not only the gender but also the date of birth, death, place of birth, and ethnic group by Wikipedia language at once. Another goal of the project is to release the extracted data as an updated Open Dataset each month to provide another Inequality index on the world stage – like the United Nations Gender Inequality Index. At the moment, he's applying to PhD programs in Information Science and Computer Science, and his proposed research is to take WIGI a step further. The idea is to classify known social biases in Wikipedia, like gender, race, sexual orientation, and then using machine learning to search the corpus for unknown social biases. The hopeful indication here is that we can find biases we haven't even yet humanly-identified.