

# *Creating Inclusive Biographical Narratives*

*A Disruptive Use of Sources and Writing Conventions*

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**I**n today's world, people access knowledge instantaneously on Internet-connected devices such as laptops, smartphones, and smart televisions. We can ask Siri and Alexa any question imaginable while driving or cooking a meal. The source for this readily accessible information is a changing array of digital, tertiary knowledge-sharing platforms. The day-to-day decisions we make, along with our opinions and views of the world, are shaped by the knowledge we glean from these sources. Bias exists on these digital platforms and matters, especially to underrepresented and oppressed populations, such as women and people of color. This volume attends to bias in knowledge presented and produced about noteworthy women academics important to the study and practice of the world's religious, spiritual, and wisdom traditions. Its biographers seek to create inclusive historical narratives about women who are notable

producers of knowledge but conspicuously absent as biographical subjects across the spectrum of easily accessible tertiary knowledge-sharing platforms.

While biases exist across the digital landscape, this volume is informed specifically by the struggles of Wikipedia editors for the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project. Wikipedia is currently one of the leading tertiary knowledge-sharing platforms on the Internet and serves as a case study for this chapter's critique and constructive consideration of the sourcing and writing conventions that undergird the production of biographical knowledge about women on digital platforms. The heart of the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project, and the inspiration for the Women in Religion series, is a list of women important to the world's religious and wisdom traditions who should be on Wikipedia but are not (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: WikiProject Women in Red/1000 Women in Religion"). The project aims to increase the representation of women on digital platforms like Wikipedia and also includes developing strategic ways of sourcing for and writing about women as a means of overcoming barriers to the publication of biographical materials about women generally.

The criteria for inclusion on the 1000 Women in Religion worklist, in line with Wikipedia guidelines, is the availability of at least two reliable sources indicating the notability of a woman's life and works (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Notability (People)"). A 2019 analysis shows that well over half of the women on the worklist are identified with professions associated, at least potentially, with academia: university teachers, theologians, biblical scholars, historians, professors, academics, and more (Anderson, Hamlen, Hartung 2019, slide 28). This overrepresentation makes a certain kind of sense. Women in academia should be low-hanging fruit in relation to Wikipedia guidelines. Their work takes place in the public sphere and often involves publication in various types of reliable media: journals, books, and newspapers. Most of their names are readily associated with secondary sources. It is logical to assume that meeting Wikipedia sourcing standards is relatively easy for these types of entries.

However, having two reliable secondary sources associated with a subject's name does not equate to having adequate sources to write a biographical entry that meets established Wikipedia guidelines. Editors for the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project experience the same difficulties with submissions about women in academia as they do other categories of women. There are a variety of challenges. Most of the project's editors are new to Wikipedia editing

and lack experience and skill navigating guidelines for submission. There is also anecdotal evidence that entries by and about women are subject to greater scrutiny (Krämer 2019). Yet, surprisingly, even though women in academia often have numerous sources associated with their names as authors and editors, the biggest problem is still a disheartening lack of secondary sources describing their noteworthy character. The experience of editors working to improve Wikipedia's coverage of women in academia who study, research, and teach about the world's religious and spiritual traditions serve as an illuminating case study. Their struggles inform this consideration of the gender gap in biographical coverage of women on digital platforms generally, which require reliable, verifiable secondary sources as proof of notability.

Part of the problem is gender bias in academia, which is often supported and maintained by traditional structures and norms that govern tenure, including the high value placed on research, writing, and publication. It is true that tenure does not necessarily mean a scholar's work is noteworthy. However, it is undoubtedly a significant step toward the level of achievement that garners the type of public recognition valued by a digital, tertiary platform like Wikipedia. Another part of the problem is bias replicated and extended through the sourcing and writing style guidelines of tertiary platforms, which prefer academic sources and writing practices that convey neutrality. While the first volume in Atla Open Press's *Women in Religion* series, *Claiming Notability for Women Activists in Religion*, focuses on a critical examination of notability criteria generally and on digital platforms specifically, this second volume focuses on the sourcing and writing conventions that perpetuate bias. It addresses the question of why so many women academics, who are themselves producers of secondary sources, are absent as biographical subjects on digital knowledge platforms. This volume also leans into a constructive question: how does writing biographies about women underrecognized for their contributions to the study of the world's religious and wisdom traditions interrupt bias present in academia and digital knowledge platforms?

In this volume, authors raise up the undervalued but formative voices of women who study religion and wisdom traditions in academia. Their biographies focus our attention on these women of influence marginalized by norms, practices, policies, and guidelines that maintain well-established networks of privilege. Their works challenge the exclusionary assumptions that underlie systemic bias

in the production of secondary and tertiary sources about women. They creatively engage sourcing and related writing conventions that govern academic writing and editing on tertiary digital knowledge platforms, including notability, conflict of interest, neutral point of view, verifiability and reliability, and citational and hyperlinking guidelines. In this chapter, I begin by sketching the contours of gender bias in the procedures and norms that govern academic life. I show how this bias is copied, amplified, and even extended through Wikipedia's editing policies and guidelines. In light of this bias, I consider how the biographers in this volume disrupt the sourcing and writing conventions that support and perpetuate bias as they create more expansive and inclusive biographical narratives.

### *Publish or Perish: Practices That Exclude in Academia*

Women, particularly women from marginalized communities, are still underrepresented in academia. They are approaching parity in lower-ranking academic positions in many countries, but the gender gap widens for senior positions. Catalyst (2020)—a nonprofit organization that does research aimed at advancing women in leadership—reports: “While women in the United States held nearly half (49.7%) of all tenure-track positions in 2018, they held just 39.3% of tenured positions.’ The statistics are worse for Asian women, Black women, and Latinas. Multiple sources indicate the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated disparities in academic publishing and employment, threatening to erase hard-won gains made over the last few decades (Bohanon 2020; Shruchkov 2020).

Evidence suggests that the situation for women who teach, research, and write about religion and spirituality is similar to the situation for women in academia generally. A 2019 study of theology and religious studies programs by the British Academy (2019, 3-4) notes that, while women made up 64% of undergraduates in the 2017–18 school year, “they made up only 35% of doctoral students and 37% of academic staff.” Professional organizations representing those who study religious and spiritual traditions acknowledge gender bias in the profession. The American Academy of Religion (AAR)—“the largest scholarly society dedicated to the academic study of religion”—

created a Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession (SWP) in 1990 to address issues of discrimination and harassment experienced by its members who identified as women (AAR n.d.; Brock and Thistlethwaite 2019, 81). The chair of SWP took a seat on the AAR board, and members wrote “a survival manual for women in religious studies,” developed mentoring programs, and implemented sexual harassment policies (Brock and Thistlethwaite 2019, 82). The Society of Biblical Literature (SBL)—“the oldest and largest learned society devoted to the critical investigation of the Bible”—reports in the results of a 2018 survey that 21.55% of respondents identified as female, 68.46% as male, and 0.06% as transgender (SBL n.d.; 2018). In 2019, the SBL Press published a volume edited by Nicole L. Tilford—*Women and the Society of Biblical Literature*—chronicling women’s experiences as they navigate their careers in a male-dominated profession.

Both the AAR and the SBL devote time and space to the issue of gender bias on their websites and in their organizational structures. However, neither organization provides basic statistics reporting the employment and tenure status of their members who identify as women. Without hard data about discrimination and research to interpret that data, we are left with over-simplified generalities that explain gender disparity. It is a matter of biology: women take time off to have and raise families. It is a matter of psychology: women are not as competitive as men. It is a matter of spirituality: women are more relationship-oriented and better suited to mentoring. It is a matter of morality: women are more selfless and willing to take on tasks that benefit the institution even at the expense of career advancement.

Within the framework of these generalities, gender gaps can be explained by suggesting that men, unencumbered by these factors and traits, excel in a demanding, competitive academic context. Indeed, men publish more than women. They are also cited more often by their network of peers (Pells 2018). In general, they qualify for tenure more quickly and receive more awards. These are achievements that enhance their stature and notability (Malisch et al. 2020). The institutional narratives that extol their virtues would have us believe that their success is entirely self-made. What tenure committees fail to recognize is that the achievements of men in academia are made possible by biased systems that rely on support from those who are in turn marginalized, particularly women academics.

Academic institutions often disregard the barriers to advancement and tenure for women. Institutional assessments of systemic gender bias in the promotion and tenure process and the production and publication of research are hard to come by. However, some studies show how standard academic research and writing practices support biased social norms and sustain ongoing gender bias in academic settings. A study conducted by Linda Babcock, Maria P. Recalde, Lise Vesterlund, and Laurie Weingart (2017, 715)—“Gender Differences in Accepting and Receiving Requests for Tasks with Low Promotability”—shows that women are asked to perform low-promotability tasks such as “serving on an undergraduate curriculum revision committee” more often than men. These tasks may be institutionally significant and therefore worthy but leave women less time to publish—a primary focus of tenure committees. Kim Mitchell (2017), in “Academic Voice On Feminism, Presence, and Objectivity in Writing,” finds that standards for scholarly writing that promote objectivity make the subjective, perspectival writings of feminists, womanists, queer theorists, and others suspect. Furthermore, tenure committees often favor publication in prestigious, peer-reviewed journals as an indicator of influence and success. Other types of publication and modes of knowledge production, which might enhance the tenure prospects of overburdened women professors, are considered less desirable as a measure of success (Heckman and Moktan 2020). Finally, networks of privilege that facilitate academic advancement are largely populated by men who generally support and cite other men more often than their differently identified peers (Pells 2018). Institutions whose tenure and promotion processes ignore these dynamics ensure the privilege of men at the top and often sabotage the chances for public recognition, promotion, and tenure for women and other marginalized persons.

### *Sourcing and Style Guidelines: Practices that Exclude on Wikipedia*

The Enlightenment encyclopedia scheme is based on the idealistic notion that a referenced, unbiased collection of the world’s knowledge can be assembled and disseminated for humanity’s benefit (Reagle and Koerner 2020). On Wikipedia, this collection is curat-

ed by volunteers called Wikipedians, who have collaboratively developed and are guided by a set of policies and guidelines meant to maintain the accuracy and neutrality of information available on this highly trafficked website. Studies show Wikipedia's reliability rivals the reliability of well-respected encyclopedic projects like the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Cooke 2020). However, much research indicates that Wikipedia guidelines actually result in a biased representation of knowledge. Even though Wikipedia aspires to be a compendium of the sum of all knowledge, its content and contributor gaps indicate a replication of bias that exists across the spectrum of communities marginalized in society at large by sexism, racism, colonialism, and more (Vrana, Sengupta, and Bouterse 2020, 8; Dittus 2018). The relevant example in the context of this volume is the current gender gap on Wikipedia, where only 13% of editors worldwide identify as women, and only 18% of biographical entries are about women (Wikipedia n.d., "Gender Bias on Wikipedia; Hesse 2019). Informed by Enlightenment ideals that underpin the modern encyclopedic project, Wikipedia editors engage in policy creation that supports sourcing and writing style conventions that promote neutrality and an emphasis on notable experts. This includes a preference for peer-reviewed, academic sources authored by academic authorities (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Reliable Sources"). Thus, academic institutional practices that result in the overrepresentation of men at senior levels in academia are reflected and amplified across Wikipedia's policy pages, including its notability, neutral point of view, conflict of interest, reliability and verifiability, and hyperlinking style guidelines. Identifying the underlying assumptions that enable the construction and deployment of these guidelines and considering who is potentially excluded when they are applied provides a necessary critical lens. It allows us to see how women in academia, who have made worthy contributions to the study of the world's religious and wisdom traditions, remain underrepresented on Wikipedia and other digital platforms.

### *Notability (Academics)*

Wikipedia's general notability guidelines judge a subject's notability based on widespread coverage in reliable secondary sources (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Notability"). However, Wikipedia also has specific notability guidelines for biographies about academics, recog-

nizing the fact that “many scientists, researchers, philosophers, and other scholars . . . are notably influential in the world of ideas without their biographies being the subject of secondary sources” (Wikipedia n.d., “Wikipedia: Notability (Academics)”). The guidelines for academic notability also indicate that having published works does not make one noteworthy in and of itself. Notability for an academic is judged by the influence and impact of their work, substantiated by reliable sources. These more-specific notability standards enable a Wikipedia editor to pursue an article about an academic who is not well-known and does not necessarily have biographical coverage in reliable secondary sources. Nevertheless, the emphasis on secondary sources remains. The guidelines indicate that “the most typical way” of satisfying the “significant impact” criteria is by the presence of “several extremely highly cited scholarly publications or a substantial number of scholarly publications with significant citation rates” (Wikipedia n.d., “Wikipedia: Notability (Academics)”).

Notability guidelines focus on a quantitative assessment of achievement that mirrors the focus of tenure committees on publication, citation, and traditional measures of achievement like prestigious awards. Women are underrecognized in relation to these measures in academia and published literature and subsequently on digital platforms like Wikipedia. An analysis of limited secondary sources might make a case for an unknown academic’s notability, but such analysis is considered primary research. Wikipedia is self-defined as a tertiary knowledge platform, and primary research is not allowed (Wikipedia n.d., “Wikipedia: Reliable Sources”). The guidelines and the editors that use them assume that if an academic is noteworthy enough to be included on Wikipedia, they will have adequate secondary sources to support an entry. Research shows this is not the case. These guidelines and assumptions exclude women whose work is significant in their local and institutional context, in the broader academic milieu, and in the wider community and culture but is not widely covered by secondary sources. Even if the significance of their work in the cultural contexts they affect can be proven with various types of qualitative sources, such as interviews and oral histories, without adequate secondary sources they will not have an article on Wikipedia.



## *Neutral point of view*

Wikipedia's neutral point of view (NPOV) policy, which is strictly enforced, states that content must present a fair, proportional representation of "all significant views that have been published by reliable sources on a topic." In keeping with Wikipedia's emphasis on secondary sources, views are to be presented "in proportion to the prominence of each viewpoint in the published, reliable sources." The goal is to eliminate editorial bias (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Neutral Point of View"). The underlying assumption is that the most valid and reliable methods of knowledge production and conveyance are from points of view that are impartial and that unbiased language neutralizes an author's personal bias.

Feminist researcher Leigh Gruwell (2015, 121) addresses the issue of neutrality in her article "Wikipedia's Politics of Exclusion," stating that "neutrality or unbiasedness is an illusion." She notes that Wikipedia policy pages are not explicit "that there is such a thing as objectivity in a philosophical sense. . . . Rather to be neutral is to describe debates rather than engage in them" (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Neutral Point of View/FAQ"). Gruwell goes on to note, however, that Wikipedia encourages an encyclopedic style of writing "that is formal, impersonal and dispassionate" (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Writing Better Articles"). Gruwell concludes that "even though Wikipedia claims that neutrality and objectivity are not the same thing, its style policy actively discourages any show of embodied positionality" (122). In contrast, feminist and qualitative researchers identify the situated, located nature of all research perspectives. From this position, bias is best handled by a detailed disclosure of embodied perspectives and biases (Hesse-Biber, Gilmartin, and Lydenberg 1999; Spickard, Landres, and McGuire 2002). It is reasonable to assume that women and others informed by these methodologies, who are already busy negotiating their careers in the context of structural bias, might choose not to engage in projects where feminist and other ways of writing are censored. NPOV policies are a good example of writing norms that discourage potential editors who identify with marginalized communities from volunteering their time on platforms like Wikipedia.

## *Conflict of interest*

Conflict of interest (COI) policies enhance public confidence in Wikipedia's neutrality by discouraging autobiographical, promotional, and paid contributions (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Conflict of Interest"). In the case of biographical entries, Wikipedia's COI policies assume that information provided by the subject of an article or associated parties is biased because the author of the edit is too close to the subject matter. This perspective is related to NPOV policies in that it assumes that neutrality is possible and desirable but best achieved at a distance from the subject or topic. It follows that contributions provided by editors who do not know the subject are more likely to be unbiased and disinterested. Bias and editing for self-interest, such as advertising, are the primary concerns of this policy. A feminist approach suggests that an interested perspective is not necessarily a conflict of interest if bias is identified and accounted for. People close to the subject and the subject themselves can provide a needed, embodied point of view on aspects of a subject's noteworthy character.

Wikipedia guidelines and policies apply to all content, but studies show that articles by and about women are more highly scrutinized and therefore more affected by policies like COI. Women academics regularly contact the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project for help because their attempts to correct erroneous information in entries written about them are rejected subject to COI policies. In these cases, incorrect information supported by secondary sources is prioritized over information provided by the article's subject or an interested party like a close friend, student, or employer. Women academics also contact the project because they realize they are as notable as their male colleagues but are not recognized on Wikipedia and find that they cannot address that concern because of COI policies. Wikipedia offers potential remedies such as seeking help from Wikipedians on an entry's "Talk Page." However, this requires a level of expertise—such as knowledge about what a "talk page" is—that most people do not have.

Feminist and qualitative researchers identify the situated, located nature of all research perspectives. Research methodologies informed by these perspectives suggest that perspectival bias is best handled by a detailed disclosure of a particular researcher's embodied perspectives and biases (Michael Bell 2004, 10–11, 18–19). Authors, researchers, and Wikipedia editors who have personal experiences

and relationships with their subjects have access to sources that may be unavailable or difficult to find for an unconnected editor. Who better to edit a fact-based description of the work of a particular Assemblies of God missionary in Africa than a practitioner of the faith who has a relationship with the subject, as long as a disclosure of the relationship is supplied? Nevertheless, as defined by Wikipedia's COI policies, because the editor has a relationship to the subject, this well-informed research is excluded.

### *Verifiability and Reliability*

“The goal of Wikipedia is to become a complete and reliable encyclopedia” (Wikipedia n.d., “Wikipedia: Verifiability”). Wikipedia policies identify that “verifiability is key to becoming a reliable source.” Its verifiability and reliability policies are an interrelated part of this goal. Verifiability guidelines require “in-line citations for any material challenged or likely to be challenged and for all quotations”. Reliability guidelines state that this material or content should be based on reliable, independent, published sources with a reputation for fact-checking and accuracy. Furthermore, the emphasis on in-text citations is meant to promote a transparent use of sources that allows readers to fact-check or verify for themselves. Reliable sources are published materials with a publication process known for accuracy and an author regarded as an authority on the subject or both (Wikipedia n.d., “Wikipedia: Reliable Sources”). There is a strong preference for secondary sources over tertiary and primary sources. Primary sources may be used sparingly, but all interpretive claims or analyses about primary sources must reference a secondary source. The reliability of the information on Wikipedia is high because these policies allow for quick deletion of false or unreliable information.

Taken together, Wikipedia's verifiability and reliability guidelines assume that institutional reputation and prestige enhance reliability. The consensus is that sources published by well-respected academic or journalistic institutions are more reliable than biographical information published by lesser-known publishing houses and local news outlets and certainly more reliable than unpublished, first-hand accounts. Editors often decide against contributing content about women covered by local journalistic sources, hard-to-access archival sources, and less common sources such as multimedia

or audio because the reliability of these unconventional sources may be called into question. There is also an assumption, at least in practice, that since text-based and published sources are easier to catalog and categorize, they are therefore easier to verify and, consequently, more reliable and higher quality. In “Possible Enlightenment’s: Wikipedia’s Encyclopedic Promise and Epistemological Failure,” published in *Wikipedia@20*, Matthew Vetter (2020, 9) identifies that such policies promote a preference for print sources that are easy for both editors and readers to verify. However, he suggests that this print-centric bias ends up excluding editors who use “marginalized knowledge making practices” such as oral histories. Oral histories are treated as primary sources on Wikipedia. They are admissible as a reliable citation only if they are published in a fixed form such as print, video, or audio recording.

### *Hyperlinking style*

Hyperlinks and live citations form the structural foundation of Wikipedia’s technological platform, which allows for and promotes the linkage of pages within the Wikimedia system and across the World Wide Web (Wikipedia n.d., “Wikipedia: Manual of Style/Linking”; “Wikipedia: Orphan”). The aim of linking is to quickly connect readers to relevant information that would help someone understand the topic of the entry. The guidelines for how to do hyperlinking are relatively straightforward. A click on the hyperlink tab allows any editor to easily drop a link into the text that will automatically take a reader to a related article internal to the Wikimedia platform or to an external link on the World Wide Web. Kirsten Menger-Anderson (2020, 2), in her article “The Sum of What? On Gender, Visibility, and Wikipedia,” explains that “linked citations that appear at the bottom of Wikipedia pages provide both verifiability to the page content and visibility for the sources themselves—potentially a lot of visibility . . . After the University of Washington added links to its digital collections, Wikipedia directed more than 11,000 visitors to their collections over the course of one year.”

However, hyperlinking policies assume that relevant information will be cited and linked regardless of gender. They do not take into account that studies show men cite men more often than they cite women, and men dominate the Wikipedia editing space where only 13% of editors identify as women. These gender gaps result in

a structural deficit where entries about women have fewer internal and external links. This structural inequity means that entries about women are less likely to be viewed via hyperlinks than entries about men. It also means that Wikipedia articles are less likely to link to external sources about women. This exclusion matters because visits to biographical entries on Wikipedia and to a subject's work on the World Wide Web result in more citations of their work. Visibility and citations matter for the advancement of careers, especially in academia (Wagner, Graells-Garrido, Garcia, and Menczer 2016, 20).

Taken together, these Wikipedia standards, meant to assure the reliability and accuracy of the information people access millions of times a day, also reproduce the exclusion that makes gender bias a norm in the institutions and systems that govern our society. If we want to address this systemic bias, we need to deal with the biased sourcing and writing conventions and the exclusionary practices that maintain them. Given this context, I present the biographies in this volume with an eye toward how the authors interrupt the biased sourcing habits and discourses that govern biographical submissions on digital, encyclopedic platforms like Wikipedia. How does their work challenge these assumptions and conventions and offer alternatives?

## *Writing Inclusive Biographies: Disrupting and Extending Sourcing and Writing Conventions*

Traditional sourcing and writing practices deployed within the halls of academia and in writing generally create a self-perpetuating cycle that reinforces existing privilege. Success in academia and notability on Wikipedia is measured by how much an academic publishes and how often that work is cited. In this volume, the biographers recognize this self-perpetuating cycle of privilege and bias and the fallacy of the assumptions and practices that reproduce exclusion. They understand that it is not enough to create a secondary, biographical source about a noteworthy academic whose life and works have not received attention by secondary sources or tertiary knowledge platforms. They delve deeper, deploying writing practices that seek to interrupt bias, leaning into a disruptive and strategic use of their sources. They prioritize analyses of their subjects' cultural significance

over quantitative assessments that have the potential to overlook the impact of their subjects' work. They identify their points of view and celebrate their subjects' located, particular perspectives. They work to make their archival and qualitative sources identifiable and accessible to readers for fact-checking. They consider and describe their subjects' embodied experiences as an authentic, and therefore authoritative, verification of truth. Finally, these biographers document their subjects' networks of citational influence. Taken together, this collection of biographies challenges the traditional practices of exclusion in the academy and on tertiary knowledge platforms. These works help to reform and transform the larger historical narrative about women in the academy and the broader cultural context.

### *Highlighting Cultural Significance*

Judgments about the noteworthy character of an academic's life and works, broadly and specifically on Wikipedia, are most often based on quantitative measures. How many awards has the person received? How many books have they published? How often do other authors cite their works? In Wikipedia's case, the definitive quantitative measure is the number of secondary sources covering their life and work (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Notability (Academics)"). Quantitative measures make judgments by tenure committees and Wikipedia gatekeepers alike less messy and more straightforward. However, while neat and clean, quantitative measures also make it easy to overlook the influence of academics like the women covered in this volume, who may not be publicly acclaimed for their work and its impact but should be. Quantitative metrics do not easily capture the cultural significance of an academic's work for the local, regional, and even global communities they interact with, serve, and vicariously influence.

Biographers in this volume take account of the cultural significance of their subject's life and work by considering and assessing its effect on the people they encounter, write about, and who read their work. They cite published scholarly and media analyses of their subject's past and ongoing influence. When available, they access archival data and local sources. They also extend these assessments with their own analysis informed by personal communications, interviews, and oral histories. Using these methods, they provide a qual-

itative sense of the impact these academics have on their fields and the broader culture.

Wikipedia's notability guidelines state that it is not the number of books, articles, or papers a scholar has written that indicate an academic's notability. Instead, it is the coverage of this work in the media (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Notability (Academics)"). Kimberly Carter provides this published analysis in her biography about Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes. However, even more appropriately, Carter's analysis focuses on the practical results of Walker-Barnes's work on racial reconciliation. Carter points us away from assessing notability based on a quantitative assessment of secondary sources and toward an assessment based on cultural significance. She does this by documenting the extension of the impact of Walker-Barnes's academic publications through mediums such as her social media presence and her career as a counselor.

The guiding thread in Sheryl Johnson's biography about Rev. Dr. Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng is Ng's philosophical focus on the impact of her teaching and writing on present and future generations. Johnson provides a routine examination of Ng's theological and pedagogical themes and ideas. However, she also highlights how these ideas and methodologies helped identify and challenge White privilege before it was a popular thing to do. Johnson presents a nuanced, cogent analysis of Ng's theoretical perspective while continually returning to the pragmatic impact of her work. Johnson does not use her sources to help readers count publications and awards to measure Ng's noteworthy character. Instead, she creates a counternarrative through analysis that offers a glimpse into the cultural significance of Ng's life and work as it changed attitudes about race and gender, from church basements and college classrooms in Canada to a broader reach of influence across North America.

Dr. Walker-Barnes and Dr. Ng focus their academic careers on righting the injustices inflicted against the communities they serve, study, and write about. The impact of their work reaches beyond the scope of quantitative measures, so their biographers lean into an assessment informed by qualitative interviews supported by reliable secondary sources. This orientation allows us to celebrate the less quantifiable aspects of their subjects' lives as their biographies map a way toward further recognition of cultural significance.

## *Exposing and Leveraging Point of View*

In her article, “Wikipedia’s Politics of Exclusion,” Leigh Gruewell (2015, 121) identifies that Wikipedia’s editing structure “allows many voices to speak at once,” which means that all Wikipedia articles are written over time by multiple, diverse authors. She suggests that, in theory, this should create a platform that privileges multiplicity and resists “the notion of a single hegemonic truth.” Nevertheless, Wikipedia guidelines enforce strict adherence to a neutral perspective and the avoidance of conflicts of interests. These policies ultimately minimize the cacophony and support increasingly untenable Enlightenment claims about universality and the possibility of a disinterested, neutral perspective. In this way, the idea of neutrality works as it has across the centuries to support the marginalization of non-dominant, conflicting points of view.

Wikipedia’s policies encourage editors to describe rather than engage in debates on controversial topics such as feminism, racism, and colonialism with neutral language that expunges the language of critique (Wikipedia n.d., “Wikipedia: Neutral Point of View”). Postmodern and feminist theory points out the located, partial, and embodied nature of all knowledge production. From this perspective, authority is not derived from claims about neutrality and the possibility of a universal perspective. Instead, it is derived from embodied experience. The biographers in this volume claim embodied experience as a reliable source that informs the production of knowledge. They identify and celebrate the located, perspectival character of their subjects’ academic scholarship and their own biographical works.

Jonathon Eder, Programs Manager for the Mary Baker Eddy Library, writes the biography for Mary Burt Messer, a noteworthy Christian Scientist who worked as an academic in the emerging field of sociology. The Mary Baker Eddy Library is a rich repository of information about Christian Science and those associated with it. Eder’s professional affiliation with the library gives him access to information that also leads him to other archival sources. He puts his access and experience to work in assembling the research documents necessary to give a full sense of the life and works of Mary Burt Messer and her importance to academia and Christian Science. Conflict of interest policies, taken strictly, might make his expertise suspect given his association with the Mary Baker Eddy Library and



its focus on promoting information about the history of Christian Science and its adherents. However, from a feminist and postmodern viewpoint that recognizes the value of embodied knowledge, it is Eder's expertise, life experience, and interested passion that make him particularly well-suited to elevate her life and works. Using knowledge gained from job-related experiences, professional connections, or even personal associations as a positive lens, a conflict of interest that is acknowledged and taken into account becomes valuable expertise.

Carolyn Bratnober organizes her biography around the disruptive character of Traci C. West's theology. West's scholarship critiques exclusionary narratives that marginalize the voices of womanist theologians and others. Born of her embodied experience of oppression, West's scholarship challenges the very possibility of a neutral, universal point of view. Far from neutral, West identifies her work as engaged activism. Bratnober structures this biography around the revelatory and prophetic character of West's work, which is informed by her personal experience as a woman of color. Bratnober allows us to see how West's located point of view enables her scholarly and liberative written testimony. By organizing her biography in this way, Bratnober's chapter functions as a kind of engaged activism itself that points out the damage done to women of color and others, perpetuated by universalizing claims about the possibility and necessity of a neutral point of view.

Karma Lekshe Tsomo's biography about Paula Robinson Kane Arai highlights the importance of claiming one's identity and cultural location, spiritually and academically, as a source of insight for theological reflection. Tsomo's biography enumerates the cost for women in general, and Dr. Aria in particular, when they challenge research norms that assume a universal perspective. Aria's choice of ethnographic methodologies that foregrounded the perspective of her subjects and highlighted her own located subjectivity almost derailed her career in her early years. However, Tsomo also identifies the benefits of this challenge in terms of insight. Arai's research approach, which she calls "affective empathy," created a window into the lives of women monastics and laywomen in Japan. Her groundbreaking methodology allowed her to expand the scope of Zen studies to include the lives of women, which, to that point, had been ignored.

Rosalind Hinton explicitly identifies her perspectives and motivations as a central part of her work. With her passion and biases exposed, her biography about Stephanie Y. Mitchem functions as a chal-

lenge to perspectives that insist a universal, neutral, disinterested point of view creates superior scholarship. Hinton's particularized engagement enriches her biographical writing. She uses the pronoun "I" freely instead of the more commonly used sentence constructions that make knowledge claims appear disembodied and universal. We understand by this that her writing is informed by personal experience. She claims her particular point of view and allows us to see how her embodied perspective serves as motivation and a resource. Through her writing, we experience the impact of Mitchem's work on her thoughts and actions. In this way, Hinton creates an engaging, informative, and perhaps even transformational portrayal of the extraordinary life and work of her subject.

The biographers in this volume celebrate the necessarily located, and therefore particular, nature of their subjects' contributions and of the sources they use as biographers to support their notability claims. They also expose and leverage their own located situations and motivations. In these ways, they do the vital work of complexifying our understanding of the located, perspectival contributions of women like the academics covered in this volume.

### *Detailed Documentation and Enhanced Accessibility*

We live in a time when knowledge consumers routinely question the reliability and verifiability of sources. "Fake news" is a frequent refrain leveled at information outlets from *InfoWars* to the *New York Times*. Diligent vetting of dubious sources and fact-checking publications once above question are now routine. Amid this general distrust of knowledge sources, Wikipedia remains one of the most accessed digital knowledge platforms (Alexa 2021). This popularity is largely due to Wikipedia's reliability and verifiability guidelines, which emphasize the requirement for multiple written sources and frequent citations for all entries. This makes it easy for readers to fact-check and verify the information for themselves (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Verifiability"; "Wikipedia: Reliable Sources"). Wikipedia guidelines have a stated preference for sources backed by prestigious institutions known for their internal verification procedures. However, while institutional prestige and print-centric systems that enable fact-checking enhance our confidence in the veracity of the facts, there are unintended, negative consequences.

Matthew A. Vetter (2020), in his article “Possible Enlightenments: Wikipedia’s Encyclopedic Promise and Epistemological Failure,” shows us how print-centric, prestige-oriented bias also works to exclude the use of sources authored by those who do not speak, write, and document their knowledge in ways that conform with Wikipedia guidelines. Oral and indigenous histories, local knowledge published by small newspapers and publishers, audio interviews, graphic, photographic, and artistic representations, and more are marginalized because these sources lack prestige or are not easily categorized and cataloged within a print-centric system. The same set of standards apply within the world of academic publishing and career advancement. An academic’s career depends on the production of written knowledge sources that conform to specific standards. For an academic, publication in prestigious print journals, books, and news media serves to verify significance and success.

However, it is also true that we live in a culture that increasingly values authenticity as an indicator of truthfulness. The concept of authenticity has its roots in Greek philosophy and the idea of being true to oneself (Bishop 2013). Information consumers often judge an author’s authenticity, considering whether or not the author is transparent about the influence of their embodied experience. In such cases, their work is judged to be authentic and granted authority based on a consideration of the author’s embodied representation of the knowledge they have gathered throughout their life.

Janice Poss tells us that the remarkable life and work of Sr. Mary Milligan is not well known outside her local cohort of friends, family, and colleagues. Lacking a large number of traditional secondary sources, Poss sources her biography using Milligan’s memoir, religious archives, local news sources, and interviews. These sources are considered relatively unreliable in comparison to traditional secondary sources published by notable publishing outlets. However, Poss collects and carefully documents her sources in a way that makes them identifiable, accessible, and part of a coherent argument for the noteworthiness of her subject’s character and work. In this way, the reliability of these sources is enhanced as Poss shifts Milligan’s life and work out from the margins so we can recognize her significance. Traditional secondary sources are essential, and Poss’s biography would be poorer without them. However, local, archival, and oral sources bolster her limited secondary sources and give Milligan’s biography a sense of authenticity and truthfulness.

Deborah Fulthorp's biography about Dr. Carolyn Tennant also gives us an intimate, real-life glimpse into the noteworthy character of her subject. It provides a grounded, bodied sense of Tennant's importance to the revival of women's ministry in the Assemblies of God (AG) Church in the late 20th century and to the refocusing of AG higher education institutions toward a concern for local social justice issues. Fulthorp's use of interviews and archives is central to her biographical work. Her painstaking work of documentation shows us that oral and archival sources are high quality and can be made accessible. Fulthorp's research expands not only the number but the range of verifiable sources available to document the noteworthy work of women like Dr. Tennant.

The biographers in this volume identify and celebrate the multiple types of knowledge sources produced both by their subjects and about them. They work to meticulously document these varied sources and their locations in order to enhance accessibility and verifiability. In doing so, they stretch the boundaries and capacity of accepted knowledge categorization and retrieval systems. They also lean into the concept of authenticity as a characteristic of truth and reliability, providing access to a subject's personal life experience as a source for knowledge. They recognize that it is this attention to life experience that gives their work authority and enhanced reliability.

### *Citing Networks of Influence*

Women academics know that biased citation practices have consequences. They affect tenure, promotion, salaries, awards, and the visibility of their work. This begs the question of why a person who identifies as a woman academic should care about her presence on Wikipedia where these citation practices are reproduced (Menger-Anderson 2020). A 2010 study conducted by Alison J. Head and Michael B. Eisenberg finds that 85% of college students use Wikipedia as a research tool. More than half of these students indicated their use of Wikipedia as a source for linked citations. Wikimedia statistics indicate that there are over 20 billion page views per month (Wikimedia Statistics, 2021). In her article, "The Sum of What? On Gender, Visibility, and Wikipedia," Kirsten Menger-Anderson (2020, 2-3) notes that "readers of the English Wikipedia click on an external link once for every 147 page views." Given 20 billion page views per month, that amounts to more than 136 million clicks on a Wikipedia

hyperlink per month. Menger-Anderson notes that clicks on hyperlink citations convert to additional independent citations for the cited author. Biased citation practices on Wikipedia matter for the same reasons they matter within academia generally. Reduced citational visibility for women in academia and on Wikipedia reinforces and extends the consequences for careers and understanding of women's contributions to knowledge about the world's religious and wisdom traditions.

In her biography about Isabel Apawo Phiri, Mary Hamlen notes that our understanding of Africa, including its peoples, cultures, and religions, is negatively affected by racist, colonial perspectives. This bias extends to the marginalization of African women's voices in academic discourses about religion, including feminist conversations. Hamlen uses her sources to situate and make a case for the importance of Phiri's work in developing feminist discourse on the continent of Africa. She locates Phiri's beginnings as an African theologian in a patriarchal, colonial context by citing her early association with male mentors. However, she goes on to identify her influential association with Mercy Amba Oduyoye, a feminist African theologian known and respected in Western theological circles. Hamlen provides sources that document Phiri's role, along with Oduyoye, as a founder of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. Hamlen creates a citational record of Phiri's significant published work, including her collaborative work on several edited volumes. In this citational record, Hamlen includes the work of other women in the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. This detailed citational record gives us a clear sense of the ongoing, noteworthy influence of Phiri's life as an academic activist. Hamlen also importantly takes the time and space to bring other women of influence in Phiri's circle into the citational record.

Agustina Luvis Núñez's biographer, Julianny González Nieves, details the theoretical location of Luvis Núñez's work at the intersection of *mujerista*, feminist, Latin American, and womanist theologies. Through her biography, she creates a citational record of the influences that lead to Luvis Núñez's distinctive, Caribbean, theological contribution. The importance of documenting these sources and the impact of Luvis Núñez's work cannot be overstated. It substantiates the case for her notability as the inaugural figure for a fresh and essential theological perspective. Like Hamlen, Nieves cites sources that record the activist organizations influenced by Luvis Núñez's

work, providing another vital record of her noteworthy character and work.

The authors in this volume deploy citation practices that work to amend the biased citational record. They conduct and cite research that situates their subjects' work within a citational context that claims space for their subjects in the historical development of knowledge. These biographers first cite sources that indicate how their subjects extend their precursors' work and influence the work of those who follow them. Second, they make a practice of using and naming the sources of women in their works, creating independent citations that enhance the citational records of other women. In this volume, the biographers do the extra work needed to break conventional habits to reach for easily accessible sources—most often authored by men—that characterize the research of both men and women. In this way, they create a richer, less biased record that lifts up women's accomplishments in academia.

## *Conclusion*

The biographers in this volume raise up the voices of women who have been marginalized in academia and discounted on digital platforms like Wikipedia because they do not meet traditional publication and sourcing standards. They write their subjects into the historical record by gathering extensive and varied source material for the correction and extension of narratives that have, to this point, excluded a host of noteworthy women. They disrupt quantitative approaches that count the number of published sources about a subject as a measure of significance by producing biographies that expound and celebrate their subjects' cultural significance. They expose the located perspectival nature of all knowledge production by identifying the way their subjects, their sources, and their own life experiences authorize and authenticate the knowledge they produce. An institution does not grant veracity. Instead, truth is grounded in an honest portrayal of a scholar's limited, located point of view.

These biographers lean into detailed documentation of their varied sources. They work to catalog and find or create accessible storage for their qualitative interviews, personal communications, and oral histories. This allows readers to fact-check the narratives they produce and, importantly, use their sources for further research. Fi-

nally, the biographers in this volume attend to their task as documentarians who meticulously cite the sources that give their subjects traditional credibility. They also graciously extend this credibility through their documented use of sources authored by other women.

In sum, the biographers in this volume understand the importance of reliable, verifiable sources for creating historical narratives generally, but specifically for narratives about marginalized women who have been excluded from histories about the production of knowledge in the academy. They also understand that standards and guidelines, as they are typically designed and deployed in academic settings and digital knowledge platforms like Wikipedia, are biased. Each of these biographers carefully attends to requirements for reliable, verifiable sources and the importance of veracity and reader fact-checking in ways that also interrupt exclusionary practices and narratives that have done so much harm.

These biographies about women in religion will not be enough to address gender bias in academia, on Wikipedia, or on any other digital knowledge platform. However, biographies like the ones in this volume, which model disruptive practices concerning the use of sources and the inclusion of marginalized women's voices, do map a way forward.

I want to end by saying something about my appreciation for Atla Open Press's choice of the *Chicago Manual of Style* author-date system for citations. Working with these papers as an editor has helped me see how this citation method actually lifts the names of women cited in these pages from the footnotes into the actual body of the work. It facilitates a genuine shift in the written narrative and historical record for which I am profoundly grateful. Thank you to the librarians who offered suggestions and helped to create verifiable ways of storing qualitative research, giving readers a chance to read and verify for themselves. Thank you to the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature Women's Caucus for creating an accessible, archival space to store biographers' research as a way of increasing accessibility to these sources. And a profound thank you to the subjects of these biographies who made themselves available for interviews, personal communications, and oral histories. Your lives are a testament to the disruptive character of a life and career well lived.

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