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Wikigender and Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation: Digital genres countering inequality and discrimination

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Wikigender and Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation: **Digital genres countering inequality and discrimination** ***Wikigender i Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation: cyfrowe*** **gatunki w przeciwdziałaniu nierówności i dyskryminacji**

Abstract

Launched on 'International Women's Day' on 7 March 2008, *Wikigender* is a project created by the OECD Development Centre that aims to facilitate the exchange and improvement of knowledge on gender-related issues around the world. *Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation* was an event hosted on 17 April 2014 by the Clinton Foundation 'No Ceilings: The Full Participation Project', was designed to foster and advance progress for women and girls worldwide. The two projects are investigated here as new types of communication on the World Wide Web. The analysis tries to ascertain whether and to what extent the generic features and discursive strategies of the two new collaborative platforms contribute to the co-construction of information, the dissemination of knowledge and awareness, and the development of a participatory agenda (Jones 2008; Campagna, Garzone, Ilie and Rowley-Jolivet 2012) on themes related to gender as well as resistance to inequality and otherness. An examination of these two examples of on-line communication will entail a scrutiny of new digital genres (Yates, Orlikowski and Renneker 1997), of the genre-specific features of web communication (Gruber 2008), and of the democratizing impetus embedded in their discourse. Promoting the exchange and creation of information and increasing citizens' access to it enables readers to simultaneously become users, writers and critics; it seems to be the new trend of new web-mediated forms of communication that is resulting in the 'democratization' (Fairclough 1992; 1995a; 1995b; 1998) of several types of discourse.

Wikigender to portal uruchomiony przez Organizację Współpracy Gospodarczej i Rozwoju (OECD Development Centre) 07.03.2008 r., którego celem jest gromadzenie i wymiana wiedzy z całego świata dotyczącej spraw związanych z gender. *Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation* z kolei to wydarzenie, które 14.04.2014 r. zorganizowała Fundacja Clintona w ramach swojej większej inicjatywy „No Ceilings: The Full Participation Project”, której misją jest wsparcie rozwoju oraz partycypacji dziewcząt i kobiet na świecie. Oba przykłady, uznane za nowe typy komunikacji w sieci, poddane zostały analizie. Jej celem było ustalenie, czy i w jakim zakresie cechy gatunkowe i strategie dyskursywne tych dwóch platform współpracy online przyczyniają się do: współtworzenia informacji, szerzenia wiedzy i świadomości oraz umacniania agendy partycypacji (ang. *participatory agenda*) (Jones 2008; Campagna, Garzone, Ilie, Rowley-Jolivet 2012), zarówno jeśli chodzi o tematykę gender, inności, jak i sprzeciwu wobec nierównościami. W analizie skupiono się na kwestiach gatunków cyfrowych (Yates, Orlikowski, Renneker 1997), gatunkowych cech komunikacji w sieci (Gruber 2008) oraz zawartych w analizowanym dyskursie bodźcach sprzyjających procesowi demokratyzacji. Upowszechnianie wymiany i współtworzenia informacji oraz udostępnianie jej obywatelom umożliwia czytelnikom takich online'owych platform wcielenie się jednocześnie w rolę użytkowników, współtwórców i krytyków, co można zakwalifikować jako nowy trend w zapośredniczonej przez sieć komunikacji, którego efektem jest „demokratyzacja” (Fairclough 1992; 1995a; 1995b; 1998) dyskursów.

Key words

gender, web-communication, political rhetoric, political discourse, digital rhetoric
gender, komunikacja internetowa, retoryka polityczna, dyskurs polityczny, retoryka cyfrowa

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***Wikigender and Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation:* Digital genres countering inequality and discrimination**

Introduction

This paper starts from the assumption that “text and talk are central and constitutive parts of the political process” (van Dijk 1997: 27). Nevertheless, politics is no longer an activity linked only to party politics or to local groups or associations who wish to promote, advance and achieve the fulfillment of certain policies. Texts and talks in modern politics have become part of a more complex system of political communication and political discourse has become increasingly reliant on audio-visual, electronic and digital media, thus involving progressively more and more actors and participants. In 2006, Fetzer and Weizman wrote that “in the domain of political discourse, the audience does not have a direct impact on the process of negotiating meaning. Its constitutive members cannot directly respond to a political text as such but only react in an indirect manner through commenting on the political discourse and exchanging their opinions with other members of the audience” and for this reason, political discourse is assigned the status of mediated discourse allowing only for mediated responses (Fetzer and Weizman 2006: 145). Later in the same paper, the authors recognise the public character of political discourse and the fundamental role of “the active co-participants in the communicative event: the politicians, journalists and other figures and their interactional, social and discursive identities which are also assigned both mediated and public statuses” (Fetzer and Weizman 2006: 145).

The present study starts with an outline of the theoretical framework that formed the basis for the investigation undertaken. The compelling need to disseminate knowledge and awareness of gender discrimination and inequality will then constitute the starting point for analysing the two web platforms *Wikigender and Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation* as elucidatory cases of new web-mediated communication aimed at improving women’s condition worldwide. They are considered here as two examples of cybergenres (Shepherd and Watters 1998) characterized in particular by a certain participatory agenda, intercreativity, and heterarchical relationship between participants.

Theoretical framework and data

This study draws on some of the seminal works on the theory of genre such as those by Bhatia (1993), Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) and Swales (1999). Some key works on political discourse in the media (Fairclough 1992; 1995a; 1995b; 1998) and Jones (2008) have also been considered. Valuable insight was gained from very recent and enlightening works on the new forms of web-mediated communication and digital genres, namely Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2004; 2005a; 2005b), Bruns (2008), Campagna, Garzone, Ilie and Rowley-Jolivet (2012), Garzone (2007), Giltrow and Stein (2009), Gruber (2008), Shepherd and Watters (1998), and the less recent but equally instructive work by Yates, Orlikowski and Renneker (1997).

On 13 July 2011, Ms. Lakshmi Puri, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women (the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) moderated a panel discussion in Geneva on “Countering Gender Discrimination and Negative Gender Stereotypes”. In her introductory speech, she listed the negative stereotypes that hinder people’s, and in particular women’s, ability to fulfill their potential because such stereotypes a priori limit choices and opportunities. Such stereotypes are at the root of overt and covert gender discrimination, which adversely affects the essential equality that should be guaranteed to women. They translate into practical policies, laws and practices that cause harm to women: among them, the gender pay gap, denial of leadership for women, human trafficking, forced marriage, genital mutilation and violence against women in several spheres, both private and public. Their effects deprive women of equal knowledge, exercise and enjoyment of rights and fundamental freedoms. Other practices include occupational segregation, glass ceilings in various professions, women workers and feminization of poverty, honour killings, lower levels of equality and work opportunities. In the same speech, the UN Women Deputy Director states that the phenomenon of stereotypes needs and has to be countered and fought in multiple areas: in languages and vocabulary, laws and practices, mind-sets of people, justice systems, media and education, organisations and public authorities, in enterprises, and in individuals. In listing the policies and measures that could be effective, she dwelled on a very important one: “Correct representation of women in media and their proactive role as media persons in changing perceptions” and she urges people and countries and nations to use the potency and easy accessibility of social media and ICT. Ms. Lakshmi Puri insisted that “In the domestic family context, at the community, society and national levels, as well as the global level, we need to create an enabling environment, specific institutions and systems, and individual champions and role model creation are called for”.

The reason why the two platforms taken into consideration here were chosen is that they both promote women's active role in the media and allow for the use of social media and Internet computer technology to foster knowledge of gender-equality related issues. *Wikigender* was officially presented on the occasion of International Women's Day on 7 March 2008. It is a project initiated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Centre to facilitate the exchange and improve the knowledge of gender equality-related issues around the world. A particular focus lies on gathering empirical evidence and data and identifying adequate statistics to measure gender equality. *Wikigender* aims to highlight the importance of social institutions such as norms, traditions and cultural practices that impact on women's empowerment. It is based on an Open Access Policy and on "wiki" technology which invites the public to modify the content displayed on the pages: this means that it is open to anyone who can participate by providing comments and suggestions, or by contributing new articles. It is therefore important to have mechanisms in place that ensure the high quality of information. *Wikigender* has implemented several of these mechanisms and created an effective quality control system, as will be seen later in this paper. The several categories in the platform include gender equality theories, innovation and technology, peace and security, education and employment and much-debated issues such as violence against women and migration. The various goals of the website include the setting up of campaigns and networks along with the gathering of data for statistics. It includes sections devoted to events and initiatives and even to research and publications on the matter of gender equality.

On 17 April 2014, Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton, Chelsea Clinton, and America Ferrera (the American actress known for her leading role as Betty Suarez on the ABC comedy-drama series *Ugly Betty*) hosted *Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation*. This conversation was the first in a series of live and virtual dialogues designed to hear directly from girls and women about their lives, experiences, and hopes for the future. The event was part of No Ceilings: The Full Participation Project, which is working to advance progress for women and girls around the world and to enable more women and girls to achieve full participation. The first conversation took place at the Lower Eastside Girls Club in New York City with a roomful of adolescent girls and women. It also included students at four schools, the York County School District in Virginia, KIPP Delta High School in Arkansas, The Hathaway Brown School for Girls in Ohio, and The Seattle Girls School in Washington via Skype. Additionally, people from all 50 U.S. states and around the world including Mexico, Canada, England, Brazil and India participated through Livestream. The topics discussed in this first virtual conversation included the glass ceilings in different professions and contexts and the scarce presence

of women in several contexts such as sport, health care, education, religion, the military, the workforce and STEM academic fields (where the acronym stands for the academic disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, which are still male dominated fields). Other highly sensitive topics included discrimination and prejudice, expectations and double standards, the gender pay gap, trafficking and violence, forced marriage for young girls, forced labour and forced prostitution, immigration and civil and voting rights. The purposes were to foster collaboration and negotiation against obstacles and barriers and the gathering of info and data to narrow existent gaps, with the ultimate goal of promoting gender equality and consequently prosperity and democracy.

Analysis and discussion

1) Genre-specific features and the question of genre in the new media

As underlined by Giltrow and Stein (2009: 1), the question of genre has a long history but the advent of new media has highlighted the issue with renewed force. This paper does not intend to carry out a thorough discussion on the classification of genres or even an explanation or dissertation of the various theories of genres. Suffice it to say that many scholars and researchers from several different disciplines and perspectives have so far provided insightful analyses on the concept of genre as an object of inquiry. The basic notion that will be taken into consideration here is that of the *discourse community* (Swales 1990) which seems to be the source of genre. Members of a community, and thus competent users of a genre, know how style, situation, form and function interlock in their particular genre. Consequently, knowledge of a genre is an indication of community membership, given that knowing the genre means being an insider.

“There is a constant and fast proliferation of genres” and this is true especially when dealing with the “volatility and chameleon-like properties of Internet genres”, as emphasized by Giltrow and Stein (2009: 9). The authors purport that the field of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is “peculiarly inviting to discussions of genre”. Since it provides new communication settings, the Internet enables the treatment of and inquiries into various aspects such as pull and push mechanisms, synchronic forms of communication, new combinations of N-to-N (which means the number of participants producing or receiving the communication), the high speed of transmission, the archiving of interaction, all of them being the direct by-product and distinctive features of the technicity of the new medium (Giltrow and Stein 2009: 9).

The two platforms *Wikigender* and *Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation* were analysed as two new forms of communication and their genre-specific features

were classified according to the dimensions proposed by Gruber in his paper “Specific genre features of new mass media” (2008). Following Holly (1997), Gruber considers three distinct dimensions of the forms of communication in the new media:

- a. Specific types of signs (spoken vs. written)
- b. The direction of communication (monological vs. dialogical)
- c. The specific possibilities of transmission and storage of data (2008: 363-364).

These three dimensions are further split into sub-dimensions which can be simplified as shown in Table 1 below:

a	(1) mode of communication
	(2) communicative modality or semiotic modality
b	(3) monological vs. dialogical communication
	(4) number of communication partners
c	(5) degree of intended persistence
	(6) synchronous vs. asynchronous communication

Table 1. Sub-dimensions in the forms of communication in the new media (adapted from Gruber 2008: 363-366)

Sub-dimension (1) is based on the concept of *spoken* or *written* as distinct from the actual realisation in the written or oral mode. The written mode may be associated with interpersonal distance while the oral mode is associated with proximity between the interactional partners. Sub-dimension (2) deals with the several semiotic modalities which include written, oral, pictorial, musical, textual and multimodal. Sub-dimension (3) refers to the primary communicative function of a certain form of communication and (4) indicates how many speakers interact in the specific communicative form. There are three possible sender-addressee combinations: one-to-one (1 : 1), one-to-many (1 : n) and many-to-many (n : n). Sub-dimension (4) deals with recordability and explains the fact that many forms of computer-mediated communication can be stored and thus are intended to endure for a certain time period. Hypertext for instance, is intended to persist for a longer time than a text message. Finally, sub-dimension (6) specifies if the form of communication is synchronous or asynchronous, i.e. whether we are dealing with communicative events occurring simultaneously or at different moments in time. Gruber (2008: 365) underlines how the various forms of communication can share more than one characteristic of the different sub-dimensions, so the distinction between them is not clear cut.

The two platforms under scrutiny were investigated according to the sub-dimensions discussed above and Table 2 below shows an overview of the features which characterise them and which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Genre-specific features in <i>Wikigender</i> and <i>Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation</i>		
Dimensions Communicative forms	WIKIGENDER wiki-based communication	GIRLS: A NO CEILINGS CONVERSATION multiplatform-digital co- nversation; live and virtual dialogue
MODE OF COMMUNICATION	written	spoken and written
SEMIOTIC MODALITY	textual and hypertextual	multi-modal (textual, audio, video)
PRIMARY COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION	dialogical	dialogical
NO. OF PARTNERS	1 : n and n : n	1 : n and n : n
DEGREE OF INTENDED PERSISTENCE RECORDABILITY	high	high
SYNCHRONICITY VS ASYNCHRONICITY	asynchronous	synchronous and asynchronous
MODE OF INTERACTION	distant	distant and face-to-face
TYPE OF TECHNOLOGY	computer-supported communication (powered by MediaWiki)	social-networking supported communication (powered by Microsoft, Skype, Facebook, Twitter, Livestream)
ACCESSIBILITY POLICY	open source/access user-generated content	open access collaborative conversation participant-generated content
COMMUNICATION FLOW	horizontally-oriented (peer-to-peer)	horizontally-oriented project promoters-to-world- wide citizens and a mediator

Table 2. Genre-specific features in *Wikigender* and *Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation*

As for the mode of communication, *Wikigender* is mainly *written* while *Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation* was both *spoken* and *written*. As a matter of fact, text messages, posts and tweets were received during the live conversation. Therefore, while in *Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation* the semiotic modality was *multimodal* with the use of audio, video, computer and social media technologies, in *Wikigender* it was *textual* and *hypertextual*. The definition provided by the website <http://www.webopedia.com> for the term *hypertext* is as follows: “An element

in an electronic document that links to another place in the same document or to an entirely different document. Typically, you click on the hyperlink to follow the link. Hyperlinks are the most essential ingredient of all hypertext systems, including the World Wide Web". The subject of *hypertextuality* needs further discussion since it has not been fully investigated yet by linguists despite it having the utmost importance from the perspective of *text coherence*. Gruber states that hypertexts challenge the traditional notion of coherence (2008: 366). Coherence involves both text production and text reception. An author employs certain strategies to create a coherent text and recipients, in turn, utilize certain strategies to create a coherent mental representation of a text. In a linear text, both author and recipient deal with the same document, even though the reader can skip some parts or even read paragraphs in a different order. In dealing with hypertexts, however, authors can provide the recipient with various opportunities for traversing a text or a document. Therefore, "[o]nly the local coherence of single text elements (e-texts) of a hypertext are under the control of the hypertext author, but planning the global coherence of a website or of a hypertext is impossible" (Gruber 2008: 367). Therefore, the traditional *linear reading modality* is substituted for the *non-linear navigating mode* or the *hyper-reading mode* according to which the Web users continuously shift from reading to navigating and vice versa (cf. Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen 2004, 2005a and 2005b; Garzone 2007; Campagna, Garzone, Ilie, and Rowley-Jolivet 2012). While traditional readers are engaged in sequential reading, hyper-readers navigate the sites and actively construct their own reading path through one or several web pages. Therefore, both hypertext and hyper-reading are to be considered new writing and reading techniques which were created with and are unique to the WWW. This is particularly true for the platforms based on the *wiki* system, such as the highly popular Wikipedia and *Wikigender*. The wiki system allows for the collaborative modification, extension, or deletion of text content and structure. Users can edit texts using a particular markup language (*wiki markup*) and have to follow a particular content management system which not only allows the collection, managing, and publishing of information in any form or medium, but also assigns precise roles and responsibilities to the various participants such as the creator (the person responsible for creating and editing content), the editor (the person responsible for adjusting the content message and the style of delivery), the publisher (who actually releases the content), the administrators (who assist users in various ways and manage access rights and permissions to folders and files), and ultimately the consumers or guests who are the readers of the content.

Although the investigation of *hypertextuality* and *wiki systems* has only begun recently, the subject of multimodality was first explored in the 1950s and 1960s.

After this pioneering research, many other scholars further developed and integrated those first studies with insights drawn from functional linguistics and social semiotics. These include for instance, Kress and Van Leeuwen with their seminal work *Reading Images. The Grammar of Visual Design* published almost 20 years ago. All texts can be considered to be multimodal in that they utilize a combination of various semiotic resources in order to produce meaning. The integration of a vast array of semiotic resources in texts has certainly been accelerated and has gathered speed in recent years thanks to the fast development of computer technology. By 2000, Baldry had foreseen a moment in history when the two terms *multimodality* (as the integration between semiotic resources in texts) and *multimediality* (the integration between technologies, for example computer technology and phone technology) would become virtually interchangeable. Nowadays, more than ever, we are witnessing “society’s increasing reliance on multimedia technologies” (Baldry 2000: 25); therefore, we might state that that moment has come.

The main *communicative function* is *dialogical* for both platforms and the sender-addressee combinations are one-to-many and many-to-many for both platforms. As already explained, the wiki system used in *Wikigender* is based on the exchange of information and the sharing of content produced by many users for the benefit of other users. Concerning *Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation*, the project promoters Secretary Hillary Clinton and her daughter Chelsea were present live and the event was hosted by an actress who acted as TV presenter and a moderator, introducing the guests, welcoming the audience present in the room and everywhere in the world, i.e. the worldwide one connected through the Internet and various social media.

As already seen, Gruber talks about the *degree of intended persistence*, which means the recordability of the communication, which was designed and produced to be accessible (yet not unchanged) at least for a certain time rather than intended as one ephemeral move in a *multi-party communication* (2008: 366). Both platforms were certainly intended to be accessible for a certain amount of time and this is confirmed by the fact that since the present research was started one year ago they are still online. However, there have naturally been updates, developments and improvements in the content, which has been enriched with further elements that contribute to making them increasingly accessible to a growing number of people worldwide. They have also been enhanced thanks to new attention-grabbing sessions, forceful and compelling topics, challenging perspectives and the issues of acquisition, handling, storage and disclosure of comprehensive and reliable statistical data on the subject of gender, inequality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment.

As for the *modality of transmission of communication*, the *Wikigender* platform utilizes an *asynchronous* form of communication, which means that the participants

do not communicate concurrently but rather send or post messages or edit articles at different times. The platform provided by the Clinton Foundation differs, in that communication is both *asynchronous* and *synchronous*. Nevertheless, submitting messages synchronously on a digital media still means that participants are not present and contributions are only visible once contributors hit the Enter key on their keyboards, and are not available in real time. This mode of transmission of communication implies that message order does not reflect interactional coherence. Gruber explains that the single units of adjacency pairs do not follow each other on the screen (2008: 370), but rather reflect the speed of the Internet connection of the various participants and even the pace at which each participant replies to previous messages. Some write short messages very quickly, splitting a longer message into several short chunks; others take their time and prefer posting their ideas together in one single longer message. It is often the case that participants engage simultaneously and thus the conversational sequence is not organized, since turns are not allocated in advance.

The *mode of interaction* is *distant* for *Wikigender* but it was both distant and *face-to-face* for the platform *Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation*. While participants in the wiki system are not physically present in a shared environment when they contribute posts and articles, the multiplatform-digital conversation was both a live and virtual dialogue, inasmuch an attentive audience was physically present in the venue where the meeting was held and could interact face-to-face with the guests as well as with the virtually connected worldwide participants who in turn, provided posts, instant messages, videos, e-mails and tweets.

The *type of technology* utilized differs in the two platforms. *Wikigender* utilises a *computer supported communication* powered by Media-Wiki, an open source free software wiki package, originally for use on Wikipedia and now also used by several other projects of the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation and by many other wikis. *Wikigender* is not part of the Wikimedia Foundation even though it uses the wiki technology and invites the public to modify the content displayed on its pages. Nevertheless, as the website itself states, “Most *Wikigender* content can be edited or supplemented by anybody with an Internet connection and a desire to do so. As a consequence, the OECD assumes no responsibility whatsoever for the content of these pages”, thus relieving the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development from any liability. However, *Wikigender* has implemented many mechanisms to ensure the high quality of information and has also created an effective quality control system. Among the policies and conventions to be found there is a) “mutual respect”, b) “the use of a neutral point of view when drafting articles” and c) “verification of each contribution with reliable references”. Additionally, the Content Guidelines on the platform regulate the content

checking process and guide all contributors. According to these guidelines, contributions should refer to gender-related issues and should be different to other articles on the site; basic grammar and spelling should be checked; graphs, charts and tables should be clearly labeled and readable; quotes and data reported on the site should be referenced; statistical language and jargon should be directly linked to a definition or article explaining the difficult terms on the *Wikigender* site itself. Furthermore, links must be checked, references must be updated and offensive materials must be avoided.

As for *Girls: A No Ceiling Conversation*, the type of technology utilised is a *social-networking supported communication* powered by Microsoft, Skype, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and Livestream. The *Girls: A No Ceiling Conversation Toolkit*, issued by The Full Participation Project some time before the actual conversation was broadcast on the web, provided clear instructions on how to tune in to the live event and on how to ask questions and share ideas and comments. Figure 1 below shows how the online audience could take part in the virtual dialogue:

During the event

Tune in to the live event.
On Thursday, April 17 at 3 PM EST, tune in to the live event on clintonfoundation.org/conversation

Ask questions or share ideas with Secretary Hillary Clinton and Chelsea Clinton by:

- Tweeting, Instagramming, or Facebooking your questions or comments using the hashtag **#noceilings**
- Typing your questions or thoughts into the interactive box on clintonfoundation.org/conversation
- Emailing your questions to noceilings@clintonfoundation.org

Take notes on ideas that surprise or inspire you; share these with your friends and family.

Figure 1. *Girls: A No Ceiling Conversation Toolkit*, page 7

Figure 2 below indicates the instructions provided by the Toolkit on how to encourage youngsters to continue talking about gender issues after the event, since “April 17 is just the beginning”. The online audience could sign up for the No Ceilings Community, share inspirational quotes, and follow the Clinton

Foundation on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest to share facts, photos and new contents in order to “spread awareness about gaps and gains in women’s and girls’ progress”:

After the event

April 17 is just the beginning. Encourage your students and peers to continue talking about the issues that matter to them. And make sure they know about the many ways they can help continue the dialogue.

Sign up for the *No Ceilings* community.

Visit clintonfoundation.org/noceilings to join our community, and be the first to hear about upcoming events, announcements and progress.

Say it.

Visit clintonfoundation.org/share to share these inspirational quotes with your students or peers to help us inspire more people to be a part of our *No Ceilings* community.

Be vocal on social.

Follow the Clinton Foundation on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest for facts, photos, and other updates on our women and girls work. Share this content with your social networks and help spread awareness about gaps and gains in women’s and girls’ progress.

 [@clintonfdn](https://twitter.com/clintonfdn)

 facebook.com/clintonfoundation

 clintonfoundation

 pinterest.com/clintonfoundation

Send a message of inspiration.

Visit clintonfoundation.org/message to send a virtual postcard to a woman or girl who inspires you, and help spread the word about *No Ceilings*.

Figure 2. Girls: A No Ceiling Conversation Toolkit, page 8

With regards to the *accessibility policy*, *Wikigender* has an *open source* and *open access policy*. The About page indicates what the terms of the policy are: “*Wikigender* is open to everyone. Whether you are a student, a professional working in an international governmental organisation or in a non-governmental organisation, in a think tank, in a research institute or a statistical office... you can access all resources provided on this website and use its contents for your own needs. In order to improve the information on this site, we invite your active

participation: either by providing comments and suggestions, or by contributing new articles. We particularly encourage you to browse through the *wanted pages* section that contains articles that still need to be written”. The content is therefore *user-generated* and this genre-specific feature in particular implicitly relates to the issues of active participation, involvement and inclusion. These are topics much treasured by those concerned with gender issues and the theme of women’s contributions and partaking in public, social and political environments. The eagerness and desire to find partners and create an active community is spelled out explicitly in the About page, and its goal is to build a network of people and organisations that can use and update the platform regularly: “We look forward to welcoming new partners seeking to join this project. Our aim is to build an active community that uses and regularly updates this website. Invited partners include other international organisations, NGOs and research institutes. We particularly look forward to welcoming partners from the developing world”.

Girls: A No Ceiling Conversation is *open access* as well, and based on a collaborative conversation, both live and virtual, where the content is *participant-generated*. The very nature of social networking communication is perfectly exploited here, taking advantage of the multimodal and multimedial character of the net. As can be seen in Figure 2 above, the ultimate aim of the use of different technologies in one single event is to spread the word about No Ceilings in as many ways as possible, and help people understand the numerous ways in which they can help to continue the dialogue which has been initiated by the broadcast digital conversation held by Hillary and Chelsea Clinton.

Finally, the *communication flow* dimension as proposed by Gruber cannot be disregarded. Instead, it has to be taken into due consideration since it reveals, once more, the collaborative and democratic character of the two platforms under scrutiny. The flow is in fact *horizontally-oriented*, rather than vertically-oriented. This is true for both platforms, and in particular from *peer-to-peer* in *Wikigender* or from the *project promoters-to-worldwide citizens* with the aid of a mediator/moderator in *Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation*. Despite the different mode of communication used (oral and written), and the different channels and technologies utilized, neither platform takes advantage of the implicit power that editors (in *Wikigender*) and promoters or moderators (in *No Ceilings*) might have and the relationships and transmission of communication which are established are not based on any kind of hierarchy or vertical structure. On the contrary, both effectiveness and efficiency are achieved through the joint collaboration of several actors and participants who contribute with articles, questions, comments, personal opinions and experiences in both platforms on a peer-to-peer basis.

Any classification and categorization of genres, or of new genres such as those utilized on the Internet, will always be difficult and even risky; it is in any

case outside the scope of this paper. In considering the multi-platform digital conversation or live and virtual dialogue devised by the Clinton foundation for the *No Ceilings Conversation*, an element to be taken into account is the multi-media aspect which combines text, images, sound, animation, videos, emails and so on, all of which require a continuous modal shift on the part of the user and the participant, who can alternatively read, listen, or watch and write. Can such a platform be considered as belonging to a hybrid genre? According to Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005), the multi-platform-digital conversation or live and virtual dialogue must indeed be seen as a genre mediated on the net and cannot be treated as a static product, inasmuch as it draws from multiple sources both off-line (live) and the Internet. Multimodality means simultaneous access to various media, and thus the opportunity to combine different semiotic resources into a single communicative act (Campagna, Garzone, Ilie, and Rowley-Jolivet 2012). The various media utilized add unique properties to this web genre in terms of production, function and reception that cannot be ignored in genre characterisation.

2) Issues and arguments countering inequality and discrimination

After looking at the main generic features of the two platforms, this section will focus on the most prominent issues with regard to tackling the inequality and discrimination of women. *Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation* focuses on full participation and thus access to equal rights and opportunities for women. The new project conducts a data-driven evaluation of the gains made and the gaps that still remain. In order to help face demanding challenges and counter often insurmountable barriers, the data will be made widely available and people will have easy access to it in support of the drive to combat discrimination and achieve concrete progress.

In order to substantiate the claims put forward during the multi-platform digital conversation, two examples will be shown which demonstrate how the two speakers and project promoters Hillary Clinton and her daughter Chelsea spoke to the public in a direct, informal and informed way. The intention was to establish a special link with each and every woman or person present in the room and with the others in the worldwide audience. During the conversation, Nova, one of the young women in the audience, spoke up courageously and said, “For the first time publicly I want to say that I am an undocumented immigrant.” Then, Nova asked Secretary Clinton and Chelsea what the essential points for immigration reform were and how girls like her, who feel invisible, can empower themselves to live to their fullest potential. Secretary Clinton answered sharing her hopes for the future:

It is important to put ourselves in other people's shoes. That is.....one of the big hopes I have, is that we can get back to being a country where people can understand what others are going through and have empathy for it and really try to help each other. (Hillary R. Clinton)

Later, one of the Livestream viewers asked how women can collaborate with men to achieve full participation of women and girls. Chelsea Clinton explained that men and women must understand how investing in women and girls “is not just the morally right thing to do but the smart thing to do”:

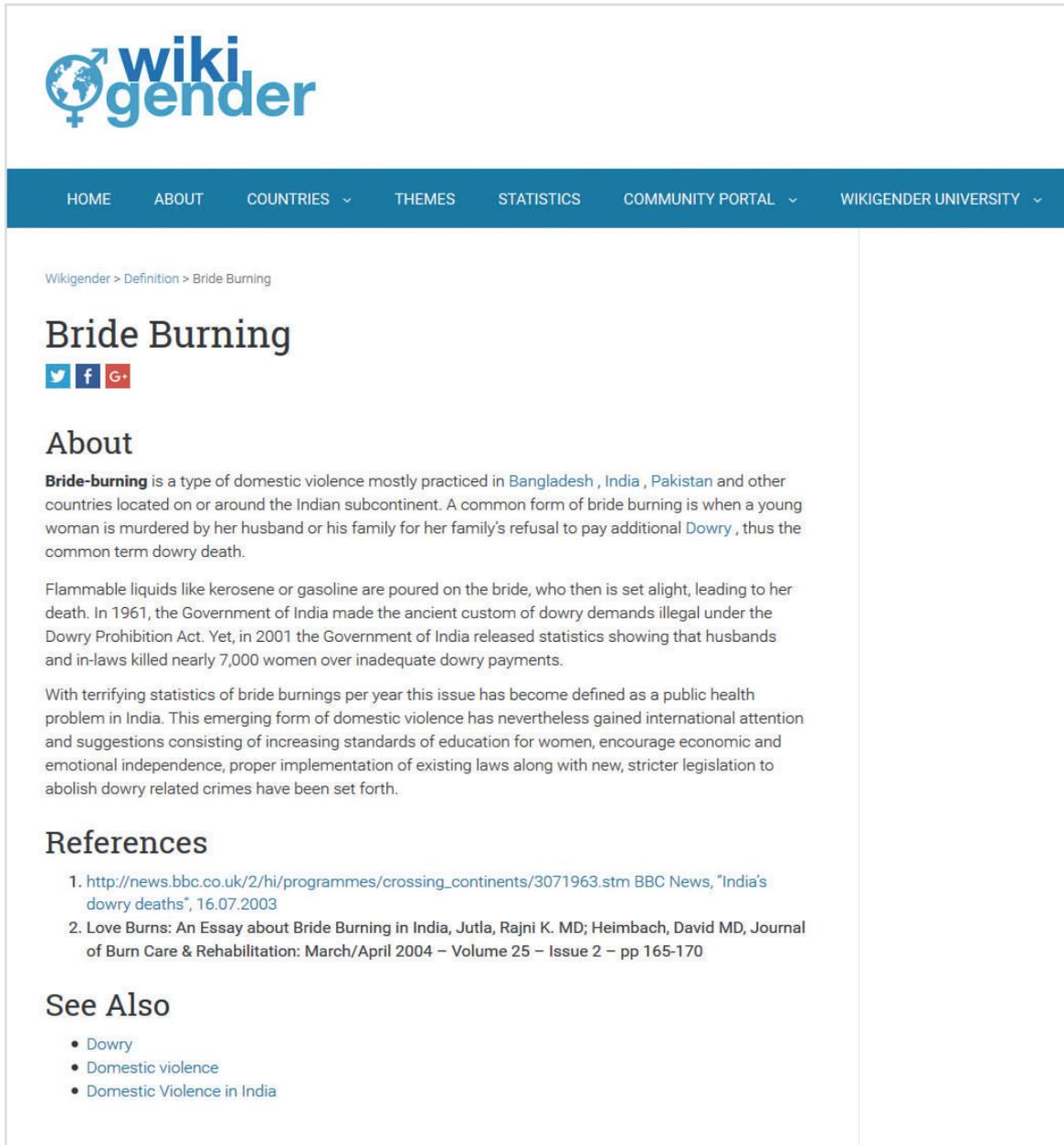
If women and girls had the same opportunities that boys and men did, economies would be stronger, countries would be more secure and more stable, and there would be less violence. So on any metric that often seems to be a more conventional or hard power metric, investing in women and girls is the surest and most sustainable path to success in those areas. A moral argument may be sufficient but sometimes hard facts and evidence really matter. (Chelsea Clinton)

Several topics emerged during the course of the conversation, and some of the points that came to light concerned three fundamental aspects to consider in projects such as this one: a) evidence and hard facts, b) technology and social media and c) knowledge and awareness. As for the first area under discussion, according to Hillary and Chelsea Clinton, a moral argument may be sufficient but hard facts and evidence really matter; investing in women is not just the morally right thing to do but the smart thing to do and all ethical and would-be sound arguments must be underpinned by firm evidence and hard facts. Moreover, thanks to the continual evolution of technology and people's increasing dexterity in the use of social media, there are greater opportunities to be part of larger efforts to create positive change. Finally, in order to help more women reach full participation, more knowledge and awareness about the gaps they face and gains they have made have become of utmost importance.

Looking now at the *Wikigender* platform, it can easily be seen how it includes a vast array of categories which help users share and learn about gender equality and development. The several categories in *Wikigender* are of course further subdivided and have spawned numerous sub-categories dealing with specific issues. For example, the category Violence Against Women is subdivided into sub-topics such as female genocide, conjugal violence, Islamic veil, and some atrocious, dreadful, and outrageous practices which women around the world are submitted to such as acid throwing, bride burning, trafficking, virginity testing, and female genital cutting.

Figure 3 below shows the page dedicated to bride burning. Several elements typical of wiki pages can be recognized: The Discussion, Statistics, and Contribute buttons on the top, the Facebook and Twitter logos to like and share the content and the See Also and Sources links. Additionally, there are the hyperlinks with

some relevant and related terms such as *Bangladesh*, *India* and *Pakistan*, which refer to the countries where bride burning is mostly practiced, and *dowry*, which leads to a related page providing further explanation on what seems to be one of the most frequent causes that trigger the abhorrent practice of bride burning in those countries.



wiki gender

HOME ABOUT COUNTRIES THEMES STATISTICS COMMUNITY PORTAL WIKIGENDER UNIVERSITY

Wikigender > Definition > Bride Burning

Bride Burning

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About

Bride-burning is a type of domestic violence mostly practiced in [Bangladesh](#), [India](#), [Pakistan](#) and other countries located on or around the Indian subcontinent. A common form of bride burning is when a young woman is murdered by her husband or his family for her family's refusal to pay additional [Dowry](#), thus the common term dowry death.

Flammable liquids like kerosene or gasoline are poured on the bride, who then is set alight, leading to her death. In 1961, the Government of India made the ancient custom of dowry demands illegal under the Dowry Prohibition Act. Yet, in 2001 the Government of India released statistics showing that husbands and in-laws killed nearly 7,000 women over inadequate dowry payments.

With terrifying statistics of bride burnings per year this issue has become defined as a public health problem in India. This emerging form of domestic violence has nevertheless gained international attention and suggestions consisting of increasing standards of education for women, encourage economic and emotional independence, proper implementation of existing laws along with new, stricter legislation to abolish dowry related crimes have been set forth.

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See Also

- [Dowry](#)
- [Domestic violence](#)
- [Domestic Violence in India](#)

Figure 3. The Bride Burning entry in Wikigender, www.wikigender.org

Figure 4 below shows another example of how the topics in the *Wikigender* platform are developed and built up. The article on Conjugal Violence is based on a Master's thesis as is clearly indicated under the heading and supported by the *Wikigender University* logo in the upper right section of the page. The category

Wikigender University groups all articles written by students or academics who are part of the *Wikigender University* programme. A hyperlink with the expression *domestic violence* is then provided together with a list of contents showing how the article catalogues the various types of violence, focusing on the “battered” woman and her inability to react and leave, and explaining the ‘violent man’ according to a socio-cultural and cognitive-behavioural perspective. References, See Also pages and Further Readings links are also listed in the contents.



wiki gender

HOME ABOUT COUNTRIES THEMES STATISTICS COMMUNITY PORTAL WIKIGENDER UNIVERSITY

Wikigender > Violence Against Women > Conjugal Violence

Conjugal violence

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This article is based on a master thesis carried out by Clara Donadello entitled "Analysis of France's policy in treating and preventing conjugal violence".

Conjugal violence, which can be used interchangeably with spousal violence, entails a serious intimate relationship between a cohabiting or non-cohabiting couple, may the relationship be actual or past. The term conjugal or spousal does not necessitate marriage. Therefore conjugal violence entails legally and non-legally binding relationships between current or former cohabiting or non-cohabiting female and male partners. It is more specific than Domestic violence which could involve various situations of violence between intimate partners, be it parent and child, cohabiting friends, or spouses. Intimate violence, similarly to domestic violence, lacks precision on describing the actors involved, and as such could involve an aunt living with her nephew, an engaged couple and so on.

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- 1 Definition
- 2 Types of violence
- 3 The cycle of violence
- 4 Why does she stay?
- 5 The “battered” woman
- 6 Explaining the violent man
 - 6.1 Sociocultural perspective
 - 6.2 Cognitive-behavioral perspective
 - 6.2.1 Social learning theory.
 - 6.2.2 Psychological and typological perspectives
 - 6.2.3 Systems theory model
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WIKIGENDER UNIVERSITY

Figure 4. *The Conjugal violence* entry in *Wikigender*, www.wikigender.org

3) Collaborative platforms, intercreativity and democratization

The last section of this study focuses on the direct consequences of two genre-specific dimensions which are considered to be particularly relevant in a discussion about collaborative platforms and the consequent democratization of genre production. The two dimensions in question are *Accessibility Policy* and *Communication Flow*. As was said earlier, the two platforms under scrutiny here are both open access and the content is user-generated or participant-generated. Therefore, it can be argued that the two platforms provide good examples of collaborative platforms where the tendency is more towards uploading than downloading information as explained by Campagna, Garzone, Ilie and Rowley-Jolivet (2012: 9-14). The authors underline that the newly developed web genres share some common features that reflect the current expectations held by the members of virtual communities of practice. In particular, discursive practices are now shaped by the direct intervention of users. Therefore, *co-construction* is the right term to indicate what seems to be the distinguishing feature of all Web 2.0 platforms which are “characterized by the increasingly pervasive tendency among web users to *upload* rather than simply *download* information from the Internet, that is to express opinions, exchange ideas, produce materials and globalize the content directly on the Web” (Campagna, Garzone, Ilie and Rowley-Jolivet 2012: 12). Co-construction of information means that participants play an active, authoring role and therefore multiple identities can now be found, i.e. *viewer, reader, critical voice, opinion maker, contributor, cause supporter*, which make for a much more varied and articulate final product than was the case with the mere traditional *user*.

In other words, the argument provided by Bruns in 2008 was based on the conviction that the rise of the Internet as a mass-medium was already introducing a vast array of challenges to the traditional and industrial model of information production and distribution. The author purports that access to information sources was already taking place “on an information-pull basis rather than the product-push model of the traditional broadcast and print mass media” (2008: 13). This means that access to the means of information production and distribution is widely available and consumers themselves can now become active producers and distributors of information on the net. The traditional distinction between text-producer and text-receiver no longer applies. We are currently witnessing what Bruns calls a “user-led content production” (2008: 1). This novelty is clearly the result of the unique communication flow in the new web platforms: the n : n or many-to-many type of communication seen earlier enables peer-to-peer models of collaboration on the part of the communities engaged in shared projects. Both *Wikigender* and *Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation* have become global sites no longer based on silent reading or interpretation but rather on the active expression

and communication of different views, ideas, beliefs, knowledge, awareness and creativity on the specific issues of women's equality and women's empowerment and the projects and aims shared by their consumers and participants.

This *commons-based peer production* (Bruns 2008: 1) is closely linked to the new concept of *produsage*, which highlights that within the communities engaging in the collaborative creation and extension of information and knowledge, the role of consumer (text-receiver) or end user has radically changed and the long-established distinction between producer and user has gradually faded away. Users are also becoming producers of the shared knowledge and they have *morphed into* a new, hybrid *produser* engaged in the act of *produsage*, to use Bruns' words (2008: 1-36). The definition given by Bruns for *produsage* reads as follows: "the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement" (2008: 21).

This is the consequence of several *experts-in-the-fields* taking the floor (Campagna, Garzone, Ilie and Rowley-Jolivet 2012: 13), and users who are much more involved in shaping their own media and network usage (Bruns 2008: 15). The result is not mere *interactivity* but rather *community-based intercreativity* which is made possible by the use of non-hierarchical links, or what Bruns calls *heterarchical* relationships (2008). The author uses the metaphor of the *hive mind* (introduced by J.C. Herz, author of *Harnessing the Hive*, 2005) taken from the world of entomology or species of social insects whose decentralised collective intelligence is based on *equipotentiality*. While the skills and abilities of all participants in the *produsage* project are not equal, they have an equal ability to make a worthy contribution to the project (Bruns 2008).

Fairclough has also discussed the social effects of texts. He affirms that texts can bring about changes in our knowledge, our beliefs, our attitudes and our values since texts have causal effects and contribute to changes in people, and in their beliefs and attitudes (2003: 8). The concept of *democratization* therefore becomes paramount here: the two platforms analysed can be considered as two examples of communities of participants engaged in the production of democracy. In fact, the high potential for participation in open source projects influences and affects users' perception of their ability to effect change in the world around them. The co-construction of information and the *participatory agenda* (Campagna, Garzone, Ilie and Rowley-Jolivet 2012: 13) of such platforms result in mobilizing and galvanizing participants to action (Bruns 2008: 360-362). Jones contends that new information technologies have made it possible for people to construct social identities in new ways, form social networks, and take social action and adds that the Internet has a high potential "to alter modes of political participation" (2008: 429). Groups and communities such as those gathered together to participate and

contribute to both *Wikigender* and *Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation* propose alternative models for addressing pressing issues such as gender discrimination or inequality. They show how networking and new technologies may fundamentally change the nature of political and social interaction, for instance by including marginalized communities which would otherwise be excluded and which can work in a less visible way when using web communication to argue and fight for their own rights. This creates a “virtual public sphere” characterised by such values as “transparency, participation, openness, collaboration and egalitarianism” (Jones 2008: 430).

Conclusions

This study has presented two web platforms *Wikigender* and *Girls: A No Ceilings Conversation* which can be considered illustrative of the new emerging cyber genres characterised by several genre-specific features which have been classified according to several dimensions such as mode of communication, semiotic modality, primary communicative function, degree of intended persistence, mode of interaction, type of technology used, accessibility policy, communication flow and number of partners involved. Throughout the discussion it has been argued that the collaborative character of the two platforms based on the rhetoric of sharing and participation is a clear example of the democratizing and inclusive character of Computer-Mediated Communication and its new genres.

The democratizing character can certainly be challenged by counterarguments such as anonymity and the consequent avoidance of responsibility for one’s own contribution. It is evident that the concept of freedom of expression cuts both ways, especially when dealing with virtual spaces. This could be the case in both *Wikigender* and in the *No Ceilings Conversation* platforms where, despite the quality control system in place, authors and distant participants can conceal or alter their identity.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the virtual public sphere has the power to make previously invisible groups, perspectives and ideas become visible. The use of technology and of new Internet devices demonstrates how it is possible to address certain pressing issues, such as how to counter inequality and discrimination of a certain group or gender through the diversity of thoughts, positions, opinions, contributions and, most of all, through equipotentiality i.e. the equal ability and right to express and share one’s opinions and points of view.

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