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Queering Wikipedia

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Recommended Citation

Queering Wikipedia

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(With acknowledgments to Fae, Allison Schulte, Srs Sharp, Toni Rodriguez, Charles Stewart, and Adrianne Wadewitz)

Photographs by Jay R. Lawton

Introduction

Wikipedia has become the ubiquitous, often maligned, free global online reference resource. In certain countries, it may be the *only* available LGBTIQ reference resource. To increase the diversity of voices, genders, and cultures among its contributors and editors, the Wikimedia Foundation has made it a strategic goal to recruit and foster more women, people of color, and other underrepresented individuals—including LGBTIQ populations (Wikimedia Foundation, 2011). While critics question the authority, accuracy, and objectivity of Wikipedia entries, "Wikipedians" (active contributors and editors) from a wide variety of subject specialization communities interact in the creation, maintenance, and expansion of each entry, thus making the content more comprehensive and robust.

There are multiple types of LGBTIQ information available through Wikipedia, and the Wikimedia Foundation has different structures and strategies in place to recruit and foster LGBTIQ Wikipedians. One initiative—"Wikipedia Loves Libraries"—encourages all cultural heritage institutions to organize "Wikipedia editathons" (also known as "Wikipedia parties") to bring people together to create and edit new entries. Ideally, libraries, archives, and museums will use these opportunities to leverage their own collections through Wikipedia and share links to their unique digitized content (if indeed this content has been

digitized). The Tom of Finland Foundation has the distinction of being the first LGBT cultural heritage institution to participate in Wikipedia Loves Libraries; their brave step into Wikipedia should serve as an inspiration to others.

Basic Facts about Wikipedia

As of 2012, Wikipedia is the fifth most-visited website in the world, and the top most visited non-profit website. A Google search for any topic will retrieve at least one Wikipedia entry on the first page of search results. Each month Wikipedia receives 19 billion page views to more than 23 million articles in 285 languages. More than 80,000 volunteer editors regularly contribute content to Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, 2011-2012 Annual Report).

In the *Wikimedia Strategic Plan: A collaborative vision for the movement through 2015*, the Wikimedia Foundation lists seven core beliefs. They include:

> **Information shall be accurate and unbiased**
> …we believe that mass collaboration among a diverse set of contributors, combined with consensus building around controversial topics, are powerful tools for achieving our goals. We strive to provide information that is accurate, neutral, verifiable, comprehensive and unbiased.

> **We value openness and diversity**
> …A healthy mix of demographic and cultural characteristics everywhere throughout the movement is key to Wikimedia's success.

In spite of their core beliefs, the Wikimedia Foundation recognizes that the majority of its Wikipedia contributors and editors are disproportionately male, under 22 years old, and (most likely white and straight) from "the Global North" (Wikimedia Foundation 2011). They also admit that

> Wikipedia's coverage is skewed toward the interests, expertise, and language skills of the people who created it. For example, our coverage of biographical and pop culture topics is very strong, but our coverage of Africa is quite weak. We offer much more information in German than we do in Hindi.
>
> (Wikimedia Foundation, 2011)

For these reasons, the Wikimedia Foundation is trying to do a better job in recruiting contributors and editors from a variety of communities, including LGBTIQ populations.

While LGBTIQ people are often early adopters of online spaces and new technologies, they share the same suspicions about Wikipedia as other populations. While Wikipedia has become the leading source of health information for consumers as well as professionals around the world—often the only source of health information in developing countries—Wikipedian Lane Rasberry (user:Bluerasberry) struggles to get LGBTIQ health organizations involved in contributing LGBTIQ-specific health information to entries about HIV, AIDS, and other health issues that affect LGBTIQ communities. The organizations often cite lack of time, lack of expertise, or the poor reputation of Wikipedia in medical communities for their lack of participation. Not only that, but LGBTIQ contributors have other insecurities toward editing and contributing information in an open space. Those LGBTIQ people from countries that criminalize LGBTIQ identities and monitor their behavior must take on aliases and work from various IP addresses so their LGBTIQ-related Wikipedia work cannot be traced back to them.

To increase the number of people willing to get involved in WikiProjects, the Wikimedia Foundation's most successful strategy has been to collaborate with higher education institutions, libraries, archives, and museums to create new and improve existing entries.[1] Wikipedia entries edited or created in cultural heritage institutions are more likely to include images, videos, and links to resources within those institutions' unique digital collections. Visitors to those Wikipedia entries will click on the images, videos, or other hyperlinked media within the entries and discover their origins, as well as a pathway to primary source material. Libraries, archives, and museums credited in Wikipedia entries—as well as those that have allowed Wikipedians to use primary source material from their collections—have noticed an increase in traffic to their websites and digital collections. Indeed, this has been a win-win partnership for cultural heritage institutions and the Wikimedia Foundation.

In 2011, the "Wikipedia Loves Libraries" initiative began in North America (Wikipedia: Wikipedia Loves Libraries 2014). The intent of Wikipedia Loves Libraries is to engage libraries, museums, and archives at least once a year during Open Access Week in October/November to organize wiki-workshops and

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1 It appears that they are having success--as the main author observed during her trip to WikiConference USA in New York City in May 2014, the number of women and LGBTIQ Wikipedians in attendance at this national conference appeared to balance out the core Wikipedian population of heterosexual men. To encourage conference attendance for women, LGBTIQ populations, and other minorities—especially those new to Wikipedia activities--the Wikimedia Foundation offered full scholarships to those who found out about the conference and scholarship opportunity.

Wikipedia editathons (also known as "parties") (2014). Wikipedia educators and ambassadors engaged fourteen institutions in the United States and Canada in their first year, including the Tom of Finland Foundation in Los Angeles.

Tom of Finland Foundation: Home of the First Queer Wikipedia Editathon

In 1984, the nonprofit Tom of Finland Foundation (ToFF) was established by the artist Tom of Finland (Touko Laaksonen, 1920 – 1991) and Durk Dehner. As Tom had established worldwide recognition as a master of homoerotic art, the Foundation's original purpose was to preserve his vast catalog of work. Several years later the scope was widened to offer a safe haven for all erotic art in response to rampant discrimination against art that portrayed sexual behavior or generated a sexual response. Today ToFF continues in its efforts of educating the public as to the cultural merits of erotic art and in promoting healthier, more tolerant attitudes about sexuality.

Historically, erotic art and texts addressing human sexuality, particularly that of a gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender nature, have been devalued and discarded from our cultural heritage. Because of the rampant discrimination and censorship of art that portrays sexual behavior or inspires a sexual response, The Foundation exists to educate the public about the cultural merits of erotic art, promoting a healthier, more tolerant attitude about human sexuality.

The library was always part of the Foundation, even during its earliest days. Initially the books and artwork binders consisted of Tom's work, but during the late 1980s the organization and library became inclusive of other erotic artists. This was in response to the large number of artists who had succumbed to the AIDS epidemic and the body of work they left behind, which was either regarded as shameful to family members and/or neglected by society's indifference. There are artist binders with original artwork never before seen by the public and have yet to be digitized and cataloged. The Foundation does not purchase books for the library but continuously receives donations from artists, private collectors, publishers, galleries, and estate collections.

Today the shelves are brimming with these subject areas:

• Artists (Jim French, Eric Kroll, Ken Haak, Olivia)

• Literature (Pat Califia, Larry Townsend)

• Culture (A Queer Reader)

• Models (Beefcake, Bettie Page)

• Photography (Typical Men)

- Sex (A Sexual Bill of Rights for the Erotic Minorities)
- Philosophy (Feminism & Pornography)
- Politics (Obscenity and Pornography)
- Psychology (Gay Ideas)
- Fetish (Jay Wiseman's Erotic Bondage Handbook)
- Graphic Novels (Meatmen)

There are also many other graphic novels, books, and exhibition catalogs that have been self-published and still unavailable in many places. The library also carries a vast collection of American and European gay men's magazines and newspapers, many of which have since ceased publication.

ToFF is a one room library located in a house in Echo Park, California. Like many small independent LGBTIQ collections, ToFF is slow to enter the digital age. ToFF Director Durk Dehner had conducted all communications through snail mail for a long time. ToFF Vice President Srs Sharp recognizes that connection to the Internet has not only improved and expanded promotion of ToFF, but also has improved collaboration and sharing with the Royal Academy of Turku in Finland, where the remaining Tom of Finland collections are housed. In the very near future, the library's book collection will be available for public viewing on Worldcat.org. ToFF also has plans to digitize its collection; it has applied for a grant from the Los Angeles County Arts Commission to do so. In the future, queer Wikipedia parties at ToFF will help link researchers to ToFF's unique resources when they retrieve Wikipedia entries on their subjects of interest.

In 2011, ToFF artist-librarian Katie Herzog read about "Wikipedia Loves Libraries" online through a banner over a Wikipedia entry. She proposed that the foundation should host and organize the event. With ToFF's approval, Katie did all of the organizing, public relations, invitations, and setup on a volunteer basis, putting out a call for participants on Craigslist. Charles Stewart responded to that ad, and with ToFF volunteer librarians Toni Rodriguez and Marti Pike facilitated ToFF's first editathon.

The first Queering Wikipedia editathon attracted local LGBTIQ activists, library school students, artists, and ToFF members to create and edit LGBTIQ entries. According to Katie Herzog, "the meeting inspired dialogue about gay history and generated an increased interest in activism for citizen-created content…Everyone left feeling like it was the first of many to come" (SinhaRoy 2011). ToFF's first editathon received a sizeable mention in *American Libraries*, alongside those events at mainstream public and academic libraries. Other artists in Los Angeles, inspired by Herzog's efforts, coordinated their own Wikipedia editathons to contribute and edit entries on artists from other

underrepresented populations. The energy generated from this first Queering Wikipedia editathon made ToFF organize a second one in 2012.

Adrianne Wadewitz and the Second ToFF Queering Wikipedia Editathon

In 2011, Wikipedian and feminist scholar Adrianne Wadewitz worked at the Center for Digital Learning + Research at Occidental College in Los Angeles, helping students and faculty learn how to use technology and the Internet appropriately for educational purposes and research. She also worked as a campus ambassador for Wikipedia, where she would go out to visit schools and cultural heritage institutions to teach them not only how to use Wikipedia as a research tool, but also how to use Wikipedia to leverage their collections. Wadewitz performed such outreach as part of the GLAM-Wiki initiative (GLAM = "Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums"), a program promoted to cultural heritage institutions to share their resources online through collaboration with experienced Wikipedians (Wikipedia:GLAM 2014).

In July 2012 Adrianne found out about the second ToFF Queering Wikipedia event through the Wikipedia event page, and contacted Katie to offer her services as an instructor for the event. It just so happened that Adrianne lived blocks away from Katie. As a Wikipedia campus ambassador, Adrianne could provide workbooks to participants and other resources that ToFF did not know about the first time around. ToFF International Liaison Allison Schulte-Wickman promoted this second event through the Special Libraries Association Southern California chapter and the Art Libraries Society of North America. It also made Schulte-Wickman investigate opportunities for interested parties to participate online through Skype.

According to ToFF Vice President Srs Sharp, Wikipedia is "for a non-queer audience" and "a public forum for facts." Sharp discovered that some misinformation on a queer topic of interest had been perpetuated on Wikipedia and cited by newspapers and other organizations. At this Wikipedia party, Sharp had the opportunity to correct the information using ToFF resources. Sharp hopes that more people will lose the perception that encyclopedias are published by elites and that their content is gospel—especially where LGBTIQ information is concerned.

LGBTIQA Wikipedians

No one community on Wikipedia "owns" entries. Anyone can work on an LGBTIQ entry. At the same time, a committed group of LGBTIQA

Wikipedians from around the world monitor, edit, and contribute LGBTIQ Wikipedia entries. Since 2006, they have overseen an LGBT Portal where they categorize entries, review entries for inclusion and deletion, and identify "stubs" that need further work (Portal: LGBT/WikiProjects and things you can do 2014). Some of these people have organized themselves into a group called WikiProject LGBT Studies (Wikipedia:Wikiproject LGBT Studies 2014). As of September 2014 at least 527 registered individuals have contributed to this WikiProject, with 310 identified as "active members," meaning that they have contributed entries or made edits in the past six months. Based on the number of people watching the entries, WikiProject LGBT Studies is one of the most popular WikiProjects.

In 2012, LGBT portal founders user:Bluerasberry, user:Fae, user:Tom Morris, and user:Varnent[2] wanted to develop an LGBT-specific outreach organization within the Wikimedia Foundation. In order to do this, they needed to establish channels for communication. First they created an IRC channel #wikimedia-lgbt, and requested an LGBT-specific listserv through the Wikimedia Foundation, which they received. All new and seasoned participants in LGBTIQ WikiProjects could join the listserv to share concerns, questions, and ideas. Discussion topics range from policing vandalism to current events. Jason Moore (user:Another Believer), Dorothy Howard (user:OR Drowhowa), and user:Ladsgroup took up the challenge of managing the new organization. Some individuals from this loose confederation met in person at Wikimania 2012 and decided to change their group identity from an outreach project to a "thematic organization." In August 2012, Wikimedia LGBT was born. Since then, representatives from Wikimedia LGBT have presented and facilitated discussions at the annual Wikimania conferences, the Wikimedia Diversity Conference in Berlin in 2013, and the annual WikiCon USA conferences. Wikimedia LGBT officially received its usergroup status at the 2014 Wikimania Conference in London. This is formal legal affiliation with the Wikimedia Foundation where Wikimedia LGBT has permission to use Wikimedia Foundation logos and trademarks, and otherwise represent the movement.

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2   Some LGBTIQ Wikipedians prefer to go by their Wikipedia usernames in public spaces. The authors did their best to maintain the anonymity of those users who wished it.

Do People Use Wikipedia to Search for LGBTIQ Information?

Wikipedia provides article traffic statistics for the month of one's page visit plus the past five years of traffic to that particular page. A search on the Wikipedia site for Category: Lists of popular pages by WikiProject will show each WikiProject and its top 1000 most frequently visited pages. Each chart is sortable by rank, total number of views, views per day on average, quality assessment, and importance:

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Feminism/ Popular_pages

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Gender_Studies/ Popular_pages

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_LGBT_studies/ Popular_pages

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Sexology_and_ sexuality/Popular

LGBTIQ Information on Wikipedia

Most people locate Wikipedia pages either through a direct visit to Wikipedia, or through a Google search. Most likely, an individual searching for information through Google will retrieve a Wikipedia page on their subject within the first ten search results. As of December 2012, a Google search for "gay" will retrieve the Wikipedia entry for "gay" as its first result; the same is true for "bisexual", "transgender", "intersex", "queer", and "LGBT". The Wikipedia page for "lesbian" shows up as the third result in a Google search, after two websites advertising lesbian videos. In the set of top ten Google search results for each LGBTIQ term, Wikipedia provides the only definition and etymology of each term, as well as links to visit their pages on related subjects and hyperlinked references.

Each LGBTIQ-related Wikipedia page has a sidebar on the right which states "Part of a series on Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people". Within that sidebar, the Wikipedian has provided related links to other LGBT Wikipedia pages organized by "Sexual Orientation", "History", "Culture", "Rights", "Social Attitudes", "Prejudice/Violence", "Academic fields and discourse", and the "LGBT Portal". Wikipedia defines "portals" as "…'Main Pages' for specific topics or areas…they are meant for both readers and

editors of Wikipedia, and should promote content and encourage contribution" ("Wikipedia: Portal" 2012).

It is difficult to count the exact number of English-language Wikipedia pages that provide LGBTIQ information, let alone the number of non-English LGBTIQ Wikipedia pages. At last estimate, 15,000 LGBT Wikipedia entries exist (Rasberry 2012). People continuously add, edit, and delete articles as people come out, theories and laws change, and more LGBT cultural productions become public. For this reason, serious researchers and people interested in contributing to and editing LGBT content on Wikipedia should visit the LGBT Portal. It provides a list of categories and sub-categories of LGBTIQ content. As of December 2012, Wikipedia recognizes twenty-three main categories of LGBT content, including LGBT "stubs"—articles "deemed too short to provide encyclopedic coverage of a subject" ("Wikipedia: Stub" 2012). As of December 2012, there are nearly 800 English language LGBT "stubs" which need expanding and references.

Strategies to Improve LGBTIQ Information on Wikipedia

With increasing frequency, Wikipedians are organizing Wikipedia parties to meet fellow contributors face to face, and to recruit new people. Traditionally, Wikipedia parties are held in libraries (Rasberry 2012)—particularly those on college and university campuses—which may discourage potential contributors from underrepresented groups. Some museums and archives also host Wikipedia parties. The reason for hosting these events at libraries, archives, and museums is not only to encourage contributors and editors to use quality resources for their research, but also to tap the academic subject specialists and the special collections of libraries, archives, and museums. Some institutions have even created the position of "Wikipedian in Residence" or have appointed a librarian, archivist, or digital humanist to serve as a liaison to their state Wikipedia group.

Outreach efforts to recruit new Wikipedians remains a challenge, simply because most people are passive visitors to Wikipedia. They do not know how to edit entries, even if they heard it can be done, and they do not always know how to get in touch with experienced Wikipedians. This is especially the case for people living in rural areas or those on the other side of the digital divide. Savvy Wikipedians meet each other online through the "Talk" and "Discussion" tabs on the page they work on together, through communication about article edits. In large urban areas where colleges, universities, and cultural heritage institutions are within close range of each other, Wiki MeetUp groups where

new and experienced Wikipedians can meet face to face, often for casual social gatherings, have become very popular.

Some "best practices" to improve LGBTIQ information on Wikipedia:

1. If you would like to share your LGBTIQ expertise, develop your personal reputation as a Wikipedian. Create a Wikipedia account, search for your topic of interest, and edit or update the page. If the institution where you work has excellent LGBTIQ resources, link to them in the article.

2. If you would like to host a Wikipedia party but are unsure of your skills or expertise, invite knowledgeable colleagues to help facilitate.

3. When organizing a Wikipedia party, send personal invitations to the local LGBT Resource Center, the local LGBT cultural heritage institutions, all faculty on campus who teach LGBTIQ related courses, LGBT student and community organizations, community health and medical specialists, and all multicultural groups. Promote the event through all appropriate social media channels, and ask those invitees and organizations to spread the word.

4. Schedule the Wikipedia party during one of the "LGBT holidays" (LGBT History Month, National Coming Out Week, LGBT Pride Month, etc.) when community interest in LGBT topics are at a high.

5. Create an online topic guide for first-time Wikipedians. Rachel Wexelbaum of St. Cloud State University has created an example (Wexelbaum 2013). For first timers who might not have a topic in mind, show them the list of stubs on the LGBT Portal that need work.

6. To the best of your ability, make the party space a safe, inclusive space for all, in a wheelchair accessible building with gender-neutral bathrooms, free parking, public transportation access, and childcare. Whenever possible, find spaces outside the library that may prove more welcoming or more convenient for those individuals you may want to attract. Free food will also encourage people to participate!

Kate Wolf, Katie Herzog, Rich Yap, Adrianne Wadewitz

Adrianne Wadewitz, John Burtle, Sharp, Diane Kryszewski, Rich Yap, Kate Wolf, Adam Overton, Katie Herzog
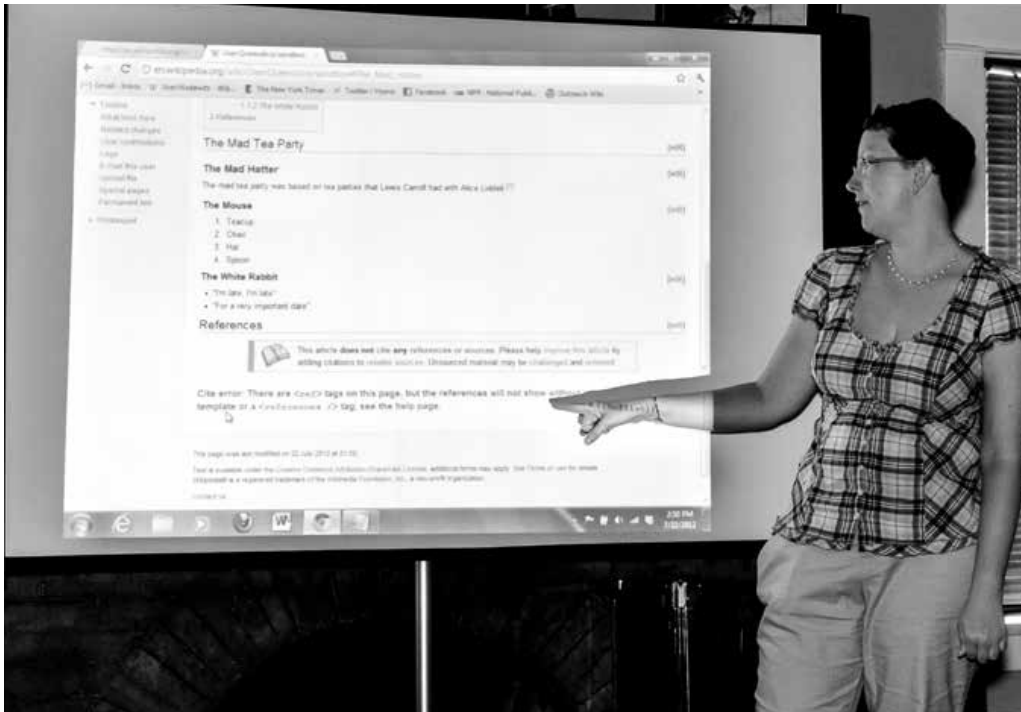
Rich Yap, Kate Wolf, Adam Overton, Katie Herzog

Katie Herzog, Adrianne Wadewitz

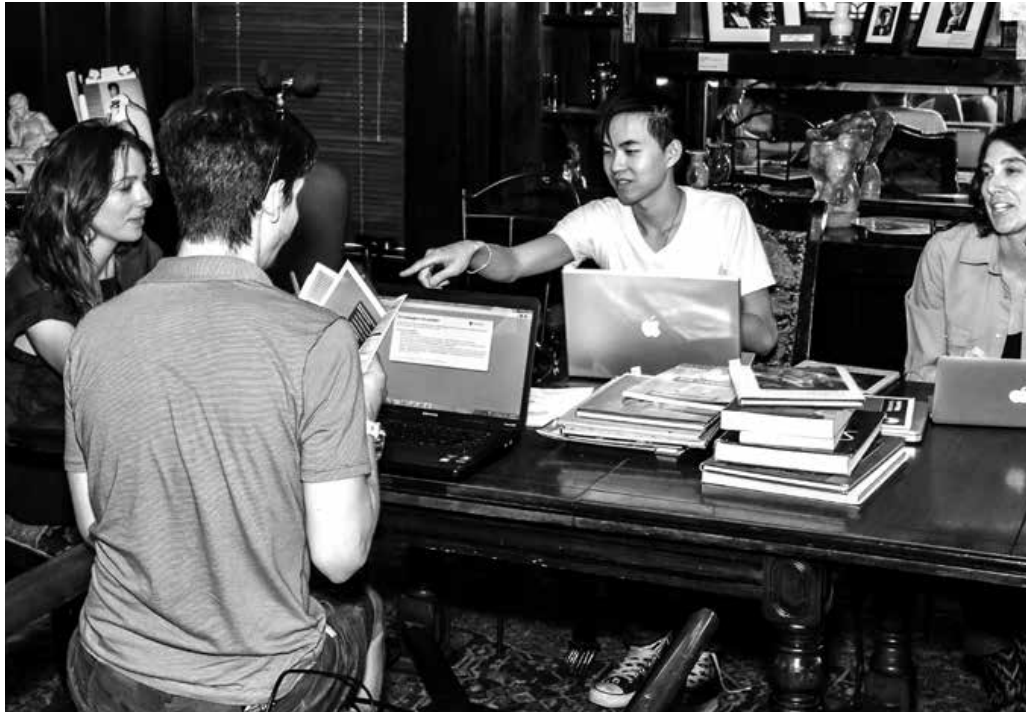Rich Yap, Kate Wolf, Adam Overton (on couch), Katie Herzog, Adrianne Wadewitz (standing)

Katie Herzog, ?, Adrianne Wadewitz, Allison Schulte, John Burtle

Adrianne Wadewitz

Adrienne Wadewitz working with Sharp on a Wikipedia entry

(Clockwise from left): Kate Wolf, Rich Yap, Katie Herzog, and anonymous participant collaborating

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