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Friends or Foes of Nonhumans? The Place of Scientific Experts in the Philosophy of Bruno Latour

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ABSTRACT

Bruno Latour has long denounced the constraints on political deliberation caused by the alleged impersonal objectivity of scientific discourse. However, throughout his career, the French philosopher has advanced some critiques of the role of scientific experts. With his proposal of the Parliament of Things, Latour expected to redefine the scientific expert as a translator for nonhumans in the general quest of integrating sciences and politics. However, the late Latour re-elaborated this alternative under the light of the new climate regime, which reveals that scientists are no longer able to translate the legion of nonhuman actors bursting into contemporary politics. This paper aims to give a recount of the Latourian assessment of scientific expertise, while also indicating another plausible redefinition of the scientific expert as a teaching figure. This is derived from the vindication of rhetoric and the pedagogical vein that traverse Latourian philosophy. At the end, there will be a review of three specific practices which exemplify that pedagogical role: cartography of controversies, art exhibitions and citizen science.

Keywords: Bruno Latour, scientific expertise, deliberative democracy, scientific pedagogy

You don't need a weatherman
to know which way the wind blows

Bob Dylan

INTRODUCTION

Bruno Latour was one of the most prolific authors of the past decades, widely read in philosophy and the social sciences. His work helped to establish Science and Technology Studies (STS), an interdisciplinary field concerned with the intersection between techno-scientific practices and socio-political phenomena. Latour had the privilege of simultaneously being a classical and a controversial referent within the STS. His first book, *Laboratory Life* (1979), remains a landmark for the anthropology of science. But even at the starting point of his career, heated debates were triggered around topics such as ethnographic reflexivity (Knorr-Cetina, 1983), the lack of methodological criteria in experimental practice (Gieryn, 1982), and the agonistic interaction among scientific communities (Martin, 1997). Faithful to his ambivalent style, Latour spent the next decades emending some of his prior conclusions while posing new provocative hypotheses. Plenty of the ideas of his early period can be found under the project of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), a novel type of sociology of science crafted alongside Michel Callon and John

Law. As a distinctive trait, ANT defended the idea that non-human actors have agency, play a significant role in the resolution of scientific controversies, and are key components of the social fabric (Callon and Latour, 1981). This ontological realism, often mistaken for naturalism or technological determinism (Callon and Latour, 1992), is a strong premise of Latourian philosophy. Generally, the more intimately related the sciences and the politics happens to be, the more polemic are the arguments advanced by Latour. In this aspect, the Parliament of Things – the request for nonhuman political representation based on the recognition of their agency – exemplifies how defiant Latour was for philosophy and sociology.

One topic at the core of STS is the political role of scientific experts. Traditional philosophy and sociology of science have inquired about what differentiates experts from laypeople and what means allow to achieve expertise. One notorious author in this area is Harry Collins (1985), who conducted a long-term ethnography within a scientific community to identify the specific traits of the expert's cognition. Unlike common thinking and the algorithms of artificial intelligence, scientific experts have the flexibility to interpret different contexts and choose how to apply the theoretical and tacit knowledge they have previously acquired. Against a purely logical or rational comprehension of scientific reasoning, Collins stressed that expertise is socially embedded, meaning that scientists are not merely sages who accumulate wisdom after decades of study but members of interactive communities who question, defy, and persuade each other in the process of crafting specialised knowledge. Similarly, Latour also explored how expertise is established in the first place since it does not derive only from academic credentials or rational criteria. ANT argued that expertise ought to be constructed through the assembly of alliances to be later distributed among scientific communities; all this being highly indexical and opportunistic (Latour, 1987). In any case, STS not only elucidated the social dimension of expertise but also called into question its political implications. Instead of focusing on the demarcation between scientific expertise and other kinds of cultural knowledge, like epistemology did, STS interrogates the way heterogeneous actors use their respective knowledge to influence each other. Within STS, there are both sympathetic and adverse stances towards scientific experts, but one of the most intriguing critics was, indeed, Bruno Latour.

Broadly stated, the role of scientific experts might become problematic in the framework of deliberative democracy. STS, however diverse, tend to support public deliberation, not only as a mode of sovereignty but also as the dialogical mechanism through which a plethora of actors can direct their particular efforts in a univocal direction. Note that this is not a mere declaration of principles or some political preference, but the result of empirical inquiry. For instance, laboratory ethnographers have found that the communication inside a single research group is characterised by rhetorical resources and reversible interpretations of the data gathered (Knorr-Cetina, 1981; Law and Williams, 1982). Scientists struggle to convince their colleagues, editorial houses, journalists, funding organizations, citizens, and politicians that their results are innovative and accurate. Still, this collective feature of techno-science is far from being a smooth exchange, since the composition of “hybrid forums” where actors converge must deal with the question of who can be counted as a relevant participant (Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe, 2009). Latour celebrated the inherent difficulties of the construction of the body politic, *but he saw it as problematic that scientific experts are regarded as the only authorised interlocutors between ‘nature’ and politicians*. He openly rejected the ‘consulting’ role taken by experts in government (Latour, 2005), for it serves as an excuse for politicians to elude civic responsibility and to exclude the mass of actors from any decision. In this sense, one can ask if traditional scientific expertise enhances or reduces the political dialogue.

At first sight, Latour was a sceptic of scientific expertise and promoted post-truth politics – at least according to a 2018 article in the New York Times. This interpretation, albeit a common one, is a misreading of Latourian philosophy, for which the overall goal was to bring science closer to politics. But if scientific experts are not suitable for that enterprise, then who? In this article, I will first explore how Latour problematized the traditional role of scientific experts in two opportunities: an early and hostile definition of the expert as a silencer of crowds and a later depiction of the expert as a gatekeeper separating the realms of science and politics. Then I shall review how Latour tried to solve the political implications of the traditional role of expertise with his proposal of the Parliament of Things. However, Latour himself admitted that this proposal was not possible to execute due to contemporary distrust in scientific discourse and the intricacies of the new climate regime. Finally, drawing from Latourian philosophy, I will propose a redefinition of the scientific expert as a pedagogical figure and I will see its actual application in three current research practices: cartography of controversies, art exhibitions, and citizen science. Albeit not systematically enunciated in the French philosopher's bibliography, this reinterpretation is coherent with the spirit behind the Parliament of Things. Generally, this paper offers a synthesis of the place scientific experts hold in the *oeuvre* of Latour while avoiding some possible misunderstandings or shortcomings.

SCIENTIFIC EXPERTS AS SILENCERS OF THE CROWD

In a combative essay titled *Socrates' and Callicles' Settlement*, written amidst the ‘science wars’, Latour (1997) stated that the controversy between the objectivist scientists and the relativist postmodernists recalls the ancient debate

of *right* and *might*. On one side, there is Socrates (with his contemporary emulous Alan Sokal and Steve Weinberg), who claimed that reason is a higher virtue than rhetoric, for it is directed towards the universal laws that structure the cosmos. On the other hand, Callicles (and his present-day followers Bourdieu and Habermas) contended that rhetoric is indispensable for political deliberation since the crowd of citizens must be organised either by brutal force or persuasive speech. For Latour, behind this apparent opposition lays a tacit agreement to exclude the Athenian people from the deliberative process. Since Socrates lacks the academic prestige of Gorgias, the military power of Polus, and the financial means of Callicles, he aims for a higher-level resource: true knowledge. “It is a great power to which Socrates appeals, [...] since it can enslave all the other forms [i.e., non-scientific] of expertise and know-how (Latour, 1997: 199)”. Mimicking the geometers’ method of demonstration, Plato deployed natural facts and laws to establish a political body constrained by science, simultaneously condemning all other possible knowledge.

Compelling with the plot, Callicles agreed that it is not convenient to let the crowd intervene in politics; the only difference is that he resorted to mundane force rather than transcendental reason. Since the citizens are illiterate for Socrates and selfish for Callicles, a commanding elite is required in any case. Ironically, there is only one conception of science at stake, for Callicles did not question the image of reason defended by Socrates; the real dispute is regarding which is the best tool to silence the crowd. “What is beyond question for both Socrates and the Sophists is that some expert knowledge is necessary either to make the people of Athens behave in the right way or to keep them at bay and shut their mouths (Latour, 1997: 201)”. According to the aristocratic vein common to Socrates and Callicles, politics is reduced to the monologue of an expert in front of a crowd of non-expert citizens. Latour (1997: 215) continued:

“[T]he Third Estate has been turned, by Socrates and by Callicles, into a barbaric population of unintelligent, spoiled, and sickly slaves and children, who are now waiting eagerly for their pittance of morality, without which they would have “no understanding” of what to do, what to choose, what to know, what to hope”.

Opposing this monolithic tie between science (reason) and politics (might), Latour insisted that a truly democratic body, “in order to take decisions, cannot rely on expert knowledge only, given the constraints of number, totality, urgency and priority that politics imposes. It requires a disseminated knowledge as multifarious as the multitude itself (Latour, 1997: 201)”. In other words, the French philosopher aims for a polyphonic deliberation among voices with distinct kinds of expertise.

Certainly this is a hostile and idiosyncratic reading of Plato¹, but a closer look at other Greek scholars reveals that Latour is not completely mistaken when denouncing the philosophical consequences of the settlement between Socrates and the sophists. Saxonhouse (1983) suggested that the encounter with Gorgias, according to the given dates, might coincide with the Peloponnesian War, which is not only historical context but also a hermeneutical cue about the very nature of the discussion. After defeating Gorgias, Socrates easily outwits Polus and extensively undermines Callicles’ arguments. The last part of the dialogue actually portrays three silent sophists listening to the expert’s speech. The political implications of Socrates’ arguments and behaviour, as Wolin (1960) and Rocco (1997) have shown, are part of a larger strategy Plato carried throughout several dialogues to create an anti-democratic regime. Surprisingly enough, on her reading of the *Protagoras*, Nussbaum (1991) drew conclusions similar to Latour’s. By systematically condemning collective rhetoric and praising individual reason, Socrates undermines the possibilities of political education among the youth of Athens. He does not only dismiss the status of his interlocutors but also invites the curious spectators – who are not students *stricto sensu* – to leave their financial and political affairs to devote themselves to philosophy. If every citizen of Athens followed Socrates dictum, the agora would be emptied. In short, despite the heroic role Socrates has in philosophy, he must not be considered as a leading role in political thinking.

At the bottom of the dispute lie the opposing understandings Plato and Latour have of the notion of rhetoric. As De Romilly (1975) asserted, the Greek philosopher saw a dangerous link between rhetoric and *magis*, the illusions sophists deployed in front of gullible citizens to obtain economic and political status. Unfortunately, by proscribing rhetoric altogether from philosophy, Plato also exiles the possibility of any *magis-terio*; namely, the process by which a master teaches knowledge and skills to his students. Aware of this, Latour employed Cassin’s (1995) etymological distinction between mathematical demonstration (*epideixis*) and public exhibition (*apodeixis*) to argue that rhetoric and reason are not radically different. Rather than being competing activities, the latter is just a weaker form of eloquence, while the former is a stronger kind of argumentation (cfr. Netz, 1999). By reducing the

¹ Harman (2009: 91) comments that Latour and Socrates are both expert debunkers. Socrates started his public life questioning the alleged experts of Athens, while Latour began his career distrusting both classical philosophers and sociologists of science. At the end, the two of them found that unquestionable expertise cannot be found in any living creature. “In this sense, Latour and Socrates are oddly united in their *rejection* of privileged experts”.

gap between reason and rhetoric, Latour is not only seeking to democratise knowledge. As Freed (2005) comments, the French philosopher strived to expose that there is no discourse inherently legitimate – not even scientific knowledge. That was already anticipated by ANT: from a symmetrical point of view, all actors are initially equal until one voice eventually gains enough force to silence the other. This is why, for political deliberation, citizens' voices should not surrender *in advance* to experts' claims. When Latour puts reason and rhetoric on the same level, he does not advocate for Calicles' voluntarism, nor does he advocate for the relativistic "anything goes". Rather, he underlined the collective nature of the deliberative process and the contingent means by which legitimacy is acquired. Thus, heterogeneous political decisions are preferable to a pseudo-deliberation where one single expert presents himself as a spokesman of reason.

CONCEIVING THE SCIENTIFIC EXPERT AS GATEKEEPER

In line with this communitarian spirit, Latour published *Cogitamus*², where he replaced the Cartesian heritage of the individual *cogito* with the collective thinking of the crowd. In contrast with Latour's diatribe against Plato, this book reveals a moderate attitude from the French philosopher. After proclaiming that sciences and politics are inexorably tangled, but due to the work of translation, they can never be completely identical, he asks which mediators can serve as bridges between those two realms. Latour (2014: 151) stated:

"The classic and usual solution – even though currently deteriorated – consists in trusting the experts to play the role of mediators between the laboratories and the crowd. Unfortunately, many of these experts resemble the gatekeepers of ancient abbeys: facing inward, they must respect closure and remain silent as tombs, while facing outward, they ought to have people skills and chatter like parrots".

Here, experts must renounce the inherent uncertainty scientific research and adopt a rhetorical style similar to that of journalists. Actually, Latour's description is more suitable for science communicators – such as Pere Estupinyà, Neil deGrasse Tyson, or Adam Savage – than traditional experts, who inhabit the Ivory Tower and the consulting stances within governments. In fact, experts conducting actual research must have plenty of social skills in order to engage other key actors who promote their work in the first place (Noworny, 1993). But one might ask why, after the results are published, those very scientists become aloof and disinterested in creating new social ties with laypeople. The gatekeeper metaphor helps to understand how scientists, once they turn their backs on research and face the general public, promote an idealized and obsolete image of "Science"³. Note that the issue is not whether the task of science communication is a worthy enterprise (Basley and Tanner, 2011), but rather the political consequences of such narrow propagandist activity.

Latour (2014) still showed discomfort if scientific experts are the only authorised mediators between the realms of science and politics – or, to put it slightly differently, between the crowds of humans and nonhumans. In this scenario, the alleged superiority of reason does not only silence the citizens, it also turns politicians into mere executors of whatever action the scientific discourse recommends. In his distinctive ironic style, the French philosopher illustrated the situation as follows:

"The mediation [between the laboratory and the crowd] is even less possible, since the politicians, to disembarass themselves from controversies with the citizens, simulate to behave only according to what the matters of fact dictate. 'We will only take action when we are certain. As long as we do not know, we shall not intervene'. It is indeed a bizarre theory of public action: it delegates entirely all political decisions to scientific certainties (Latour, 2014: 151-152)".

Throughout *Cogitamus*, the French philosopher makes numerous references to the H1N1 pandemic, but the passage just quoted might also describe the recent case of COVID-19. Over the past couple of years, citizens have witnessed how politicians acted reluctantly and gathered scientific committees to determine routes of action according to the scarce evidence collected so far. Of course, Latour is not against these "hybrid forums" – to remain with Callon's term – but he noticed that, instead of proper collective deliberations, those committees are limited to a unilateral transmission of information that oversimplifies both scientific and political activities. On one side, 'scientific certainties' are extremely rare, especially when concerning current controversies. On the other side,

² This book drew little attention since it is a recapitulation in the style of pedagogical letters of many prior theses of Latour. Since there is no English version, I translated directly from the original in French.

³ For instance, the MasterClass™ by Neil deGrasse Tyson – entitled *Scientific Thinking and Communication* – has the main goal is to teach students to think critically and to promote scepticism as a scientific value. Latour (1994) claimed that 'critical thinking' is not an accurate description of the uncertainties and slow consensus of actual research. Instead of minutely disassembling arguments, researchers struggle to link humans and nonhumans to create new hybrids.

when politicians invoke the reliable reason of science to silence other voices, they neglect to do the job they were elected for: guide the people and take responsibility for their decisions. Certainly there are plenty of other actors involved in the legislative process – such as NGOs, activists, and industrialists – but their discourses are rarely posed as the source of higher knowledge like in the case of scientists. It is as if, even today, scientific discourse still holds some of its old rhetorical privileges.

Following the guard metaphor, Latour (2014: 153) defined the scientific experts as reactionary figures, since “they try to dissimulate before the public the messy kitchen of ongoing scientific research, while they also pretend to protect the scientific communities from the passionate interests of the multitude”. Instead of protecting the ancient Great Wall of China that keeps laboratories and the agora divided, experts should help overthrow that barrier – as if it were the Berlin Wall separating entire families. Also, evoking his *opera prima*, the French philosopher claimed that laboratory walls were never impermeable in the first place: “the gates [of science] are crossed, in multiple ways, by dissident researchers, industrialists, activists, journalists, bloggers, and amateurs (Latour, 2014: 153)”. Then he confessed that he has nothing against experts but only the desire to fully open the gates that isolate the sciences from the hectic life of politics:

“I hope that climategate, after the failure of the Copenhagen Summit, becomes the end of the role of expert to solve all by himself the political questions concerning sciences and techniques. I do not mean that those experts have failed and that we should leave the task to other wiser and more affirmative experts. On the contrary, the role assigned to experts has become unbearable and some novel props and combinations are required (Latour, 2014: 153)”.

This last passage reveals a significant change in the way Latour approached the political role of scientific experts. They are no longer those wicked silencers of the crowd, but exploited workers who cannot keep pace with the proliferation of voices in the public debate. As already mentioned, before the ecological crisis, scientific experts had to dialogue with colleagues, editorial houses, journalists, funding organizations, and politicians, but now the crowd has multiplied: activists, hackers, conspiracy theorists, Anthropocene deniers, microbes, vaccines, shipping containers, melting icebergs, and burning forests have entered the discussion. In the late nineties, Latour disclosed his contempt for the experts, but more recently, the French philosopher showed pity for the titanic burden civic society and politicians have put on their shoulders. Despite this shift, the implications of having scientific experts as advisors remain problematic. Even if they are no longer seeking to silence the crowd, scientific experts have failed to bridge the masses of humans and nonhumans. Translation is already difficult in a simple conversation, let alone the immense polyphony of public debate.

ECOLOGICAL CRISIS AND THE FAILED TRANSLATION OF SCIENTIFIC EXPERTS

The Parliament of Things entered the Latourian *corpus* by the end of *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*. Latour (1991) stated that it is impossible to understand science and its political implications if we remain in the framework of modern metaphysics. The modern constitution emphasises the incommensurability between nature and society, reducing all actors to material phenomena, social conventions, or arbitrary signs; while simultaneously forbidding any possible hybridisation. Based on several empirical cases from STS, Latour realised that there is actually no ontological division between nature and society, object and subject, or things and signs. Rather, in everyday practices, nonhumans traverse the spheres of nature, culture, and discourse. This metaphysical perspective was renamed a “flat ontology” (Bryant, 2011), which is coherent with ANT’s insistence on giving a symmetrical analysis to all actors involved in techno-science. This proposal demands a change in how we think of objects and the way we relate to them. Accordingly, the main tenet of the Parliament of Things proclaims that, once we return the nonhumans their lost ontological status, we ought to give them political representation – their “voice” should be taken into account when we discuss matters regarding the possibility of existence on Earth. Unfortunately, the Parliament of Things appeared as a *Deus ex Machina* in this provocative essay. Afterwards, Latour (2004) studied how environmental public policies were legislated under the label of *Politics of Nature*⁴. Despite its lack of systematic formulation, the Parliament of Things seemed like a promise to reformulate in better terms the old ties between science and politics.

On the occasion of the Spinozalens Prize, Latour (2020) gave a retrospective lecture about the Parliament of Things, with a detailed recount of his intentions when he coined the term and its further developments. Initially, Latour explained that the intention “was not, as some people have argued, to give a voice to nonhumans; rather, it was a way to give a voice to scientists, [since] there is no other way for the nonhuman to talk in a sort of coherent

⁴ In an interview with Blok and Jensen (2011), Latour admitted that this book was somehow a failure due to its abstract arguments seeking to dismantle the fact/value dichotomy and the notion of ‘Nature’ as a homogeneous whole. This was, in a way, the last work done by Latour in STS; for he dedicated his later years to art exhibitions and political ecology.

way except for the scientist's activity". Instead of making a bold political proposal, Latour clarifies that the Parliament of Things was the description of an already existing, albeit extra-official, phenomenon. On one hand, just as politicians speak for humans in Congress, scientists speak for nonhumans in laboratories, making huge efforts to understand their issues and find possible solutions. On the other hand, there is a conceptual correlation between 'Parliament' and 'Thing', both alluding to their deliberative features. 'Thing' refers etymologically to 'assembly' rather than 'object'; the former implies a collaborative process, while the latter suggests inertia. In other words, the Parliament of Things seeks to characterise both the deliberative actions around the nonhuman at the laboratory and the collective inner core of the nonhuman as an assembly itself. Latour stressed this idea: "the Parliament of Things is actually there, as a competition of voices in the public debate". In this scenario, the scientific expert is redefined as a diplomatic figure: an interpreter and representative of the nonhumans.

Surprisingly, by positioning the scientists in the translation networks that pass through the laboratory and the agora, Latour displayed a rather sympathetic attitude towards the experts. They are no longer silencers of the crowd nor guards keeping separated sciences and politics; on the contrary, they have become the main channel through which any possible dialogue between humans and nonhumans is built. However, Latour does not say that we should blindly trust whatever they claim. He insisted that scientific discourse should be put into an enunciation scheme in order to make it comprehensible and disputable. In other words, scientists ought to adopt a model of situated knowledge, recognising the particularities of the subject who elaborated statements about the facts of nature, instead of appealing to impersonal and neutral laws of nature as a source of legitimacy (Haraway, 1988). In this way, Latour wanted to preserve the beauty of experimental practice – its capacity to make nonhumans speak for themselves – while avoiding the excesses of authoritarianism caused by a naïve sense of objectivity. There remains the suspicion he had for those who use the old-fashioned realist adage that 'laws of nature are true, whether you like it or not'. But if scientific experts avoid such a reactionary stance and assume the consensual nature of their knowledge, then they could strengthen the public debate instead of muting it. Experts should become the third party enabling the discussion between laypeople and the multitude of nonhumans that are inevitably related in plenty of circumstances of our contemporary world. Scientists as translators are a key component of the Parliament of Things, but this colossal "hybrid forum" is never reduced to the scientific discourse.

Yet the persisting problem is that, when scientists proclaim themselves as the *only* spokesmen of nature, collective deliberation is weakened. Even if experts abandon their privileges sustained by the alleged superiority of reason and even if they unite the laboratory with the agora, the mass of nonhumans has increased to a degree that overwhelms the researcher communities. Nowadays, the ecological crisis has become so ubiquitous that laypeople have re-encountered an indomitable climate defying their modes of existence (Serres, 1990). The solution is not to simply include non-scientists, who might not be capable of making intelligible the voices of nonhumans. The Parliament of Things is not just a request to amplify the agora as if all the voices were automatically compatible. The peremptory demand is to translate those incomprehensible voices so we can properly negotiate with them. Since nonhumans are not immediately understandable, they must undergo a chain of experimental practices in order to be suited for dialogue. Certainly, Latour claimed that "nonhumans already have an endless number of canals to have their voices heard [...], they are represented by scientists, militants, artists, citizens, and politicians". But one might question how fluently composed nonhuman voices are under those non-scientific canals⁵. Despite his contempt for the classic role of expertise, the French philosopher never disowned the specific traits of scientific cognition nor implied that anyone could be counted as an expert. Redefining the scientific expert as a translator seemed to solve the negative political implications explained above, but the Parliament of Things also denoted a problem that turned that solution useless. Modern societies have produced an enormous mass of nonhumans that strive for political representation – there are simply too many nonhumans to be accounted for by the scarce researchers willing to assume the interpreter role.

In the second half of the Spinozalens Prize lecture, Latour (2020) admitted that his philosophy passed from an optimistic to a tragic position by witnessing that contemporary societies have grown sceptical towards science on volatile issues such as epidemics, vaccinations, agriculture, and ecology. It did not matter if scientific experts change their attitude if they were no longer welcomed in public deliberation. Making a simile with the transition from Rousseau to Robespierre, Latour explained that the Parliament of Things went through an inversion of its original position. At first, humans were invited to grant political representation to the excluded nonhumans in a condescending fashion. Unfortunately, today nonhumans are imposing their dissident voices on the new climate regime. Just like citizens overthrow governments when they feel politicians are not representing them appropriately, nonhumans disrupt our political life if they are not sufficiently translated by scientists. This inversion led Latour to eventually discard the term 'nonhumans' and embrace the notion of 'Gaia'. This was not a mere

⁵ Here, scientists still have some advantage over laypeople who try to speak in the name of nature. Ideally, politicians must hear weather scientists as much as ecological activists, but those discourses should not be considered inherently equivalent; actually, that would render the translation quest pointless. The question is, instead, which collective has the knowledge and skills to better articulate the voices of nonhumans with other networks.

adherence to Lovelock's hypothesis or the Anthropocene⁶ trend, but a way to highlight the devastating effect of nonhumans untranslated voices. In this sense, once humans realise they depend on nonhumans to survive, they should ask permission from Gaia – just like non-western peoples did with their respective deities – before using her vital resources. Note that the French philosopher is no longer concerned with the political role of experts or with the quest to bring science and society closer. Rather, in this urgent state of affairs, the main task is to reformulate how we conceive life, territoriality, and humankind in order to preserve the Earth (Latour, 2021).

SCIENTIFIC EXPERTS AS PEDAGOGICAL FIGURES

Until now, we have seen that Latour has critiqued scientific expertise when it is used to invalidate the crowd or to separate the laboratories from the agora. The Parliament of Things was a proposition to enhance democracy by including laypeople and non-humans. This framework redefined the expert as a translator who employed experimental practices to render the voice of nonhumans compatible with human politics. As Latour (1994: 104) commented, by “turning into a minority the [nonhumans] excluded from science and politics”, a new alliance between sciences and politics was possible. Despite the allure of this proposal, the late Latour (2020) recognised that the Parliament of Things failed to generate a wider conscience about the relevance of nonhumans and to reshape scientific expertise. It is indeed ironic that contemporary societies are constantly traversed by technoscience, yet the authority of scientific discourse has been questioned by many detractors. For Collins (2014) this is the unfortunate result of a series failures: the seventies energy crisis, the abuse of nuclear power, mad cows' disease, the anti-vaccine movement, climategate, etc. Today, experts alone are not able to translate the myriad of nonhumans and the alternative canals of representation are dubious since laypeople do not have the specific traits of scientific cognition. As Baber (2020) summarises, scientific expertise involves 4E (embodied, embedded, enacted, and extended) cognition, which is acquired after several years of academic formation and participating in controversial experimental research. No matter how ecologically conscious or well-intended some human collectives might appear, they lack the means to be proper interpreters of nonhumans. This has led us to a flawed outcome: either experts are reactionary figures hindering the composition of “hybrid forums”, or they are diplomats unable to translate the plethora of enraged nonhumans.

Still, the translational model crafted by Latour might open another possible solution not explicitly formulated by the French philosopher. As already mentioned, ANT stated that scientific expertise is not an initial attribute of some actors but the result of particular theoretical and technical training. Thus, every actor could, at least in principle, become a suitable translator for nonhumans. Certainly, the hierarchical structure and social inequities of educational institutions prevent any citizen from becoming an efficient scientist (Hess et al., 2017) – not everyone can access the formation that separates the expert from the layperson. But it might be the case that scientific experts educate laypeople to become competent enough in such theoretical and technical knowledge to be engaged in some of the practices involving nonhumans. If the expert is not only a translator but a pedagogical figure that turns laypeople into proficient interpreters, then the mass of nonhumans would be counterbalanced by a strengthened army of humans willing and capable of entering into dialogue with them. I contend that this redefinition of the expert as a pedagogical figure is a conceptual consequence of Latour's plea for rhetoric. Returning to De Romilly (1975), persuasion shares the two meanings of *magis*: illusion and teaching. While old-fashioned scientists were told that their quest was the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, teachers are quite conscious that the transmission of such knowledge must include the effort of assembling the audience, keeping them interested, and turning them into active citizens. In other words, if scientific expertise is understood as a form of *magisterio* that amplifies the translation channels, then the Parliament of Things might become a feasible project.

Now I shall briefly recount three already existing practices where this pedagogical vein can be seen. First, Cartography of Controversies, which is actually the main subject of *Cogitamus* (Latour, 2014). Second, Art Exhibitions as an intermediate space between science and society, where larger audiences are assembled and invited to interact with nonhuman entities. Third, Citizen Science, the best example of how laypeople can be involved in experimental practices. Of course, each alternative entails some limitations that shall not be discussed here. Instead, my main goal is to point out that, even if the vindication of scientific expertise as a form of *magisterio* is not explicitly stated in the texts of Latour, this alternative solution is coherent with the spirit of the French philosopher – who actually assumed a marked teaching role for his readers.

⁶ In a late interview with Miranda (2019), Latour was asked for his seeming unrestricted endorsement of the ideas behind the Gaia hypothesis by Lovelock and the notion of the Anthropocene by Zalasiewicz, since those theses are highly disputed among natural scientists and received with certain suspicion among social scientists. The French author maintained that those concepts, despite their ambiguity, were useful to describe the general crisis of the XXI century.

Cartographies of Controversies

The narrative context of *Cogitamus* is the epistolary exchange between a fictional German student and Bruno Latour, who introduces her to his courses taught at the *Centre de Sociologie de l'Innovation*. Initially, this course was a pedagogical strategy to familiarize engineers and other scientists with two main theses of ANT: 1) the unavoidable interconnection of sciences and politics; and 2) the ineluctable transformation of information when it passes from one actor to another. According to Latour (2014), his intention was not only to make accessible his sociology of science to laypeople but also to close the gap between 'hard sciences' and 'humanities'. By considering scientific literature as a form of text susceptible to interpretation, the French philosopher combines the production of facts with a semiotic-hermeneutical approach. Again, this is more than a mere reiteration of the insights of his *opera prima*; it is a conscious effort to render non-scientists able to understand the inner dynamics of scientific research. Thanks to the *Cartographies of Controversies*, laypeople no longer require a degree in sciences to comprehend the intersections between the laboratory and the agora. In other words, by recording and tracing how scientific controversies are opened, developed, and closed, the public might become aware of how nonhumans actively participate in several political affairs. Note, also, that here, Latour is taking the opposite strategy of the gatekeeper-experts by promoting an accurate portrait of the uncertainties of scientific research.

This pedagogical experience was reformulated as a systematized research method by Tommaso Venturini. In his view, controversy mapping (CM) – as he renamed it – aims to develop multiple tools for scholars and citizens to observe and describe the social debate over technoscientific issues. As a methodology of its own, CM entails neither conceptual assumptions nor specific protocols. Its openness, however, is not a sign of the old naïve objectivity that longed for purely empirical descriptions freed from any kind of theoretical premises. Rather, it is an invitation to eclecticism, in the sense that only a plurality of perspectives can include all the involved actors in the controversy. Those informants, regardless of whether they are erudite or not, must be considered as better informed than the investigators, since their particular know-how is intimately linked with the issue discussed. Venturini (2010) emphasise that CM does not seek to bring closure to any controversy – on the contrary, it is a tool to prevent a premature resolution. This is a coextension of the ANT tenet that any matters of concern can be arranged in multiple alternative ways due to its inherent heterogeneous nature. CM is a practical method, therefore, to open public deliberation by avoiding the *a priori* stance that authorized scientific discourse is the only reasonable perspective. This methodology takes seriously the vindication of rhetoric suggested by Latour when it tries to register how different discourses are intersected and what type of negotiations (i.e., compromises, hybridizations) take place to reach a solution, even if fragile and transitory, that encompasses dissimilar human and nonhuman collectives. In other words, the cartographer, whereas expert or lay, will witness plenty of empirical cases where the translation networks are central to the composition of the social fabric.

It could be argued that becoming aware of the translations made by techno-science is not quite the same as becoming a proficient translator; still, as Latour (2014) commented, if the public is familiar with the intricacies of research, they could better judge which scientific statement is good or bad. Furthermore, CM also sheds light on another problem unnoticed so far: the summoning of relevant publics for each controversy. After some years of mapping controversies, Venturini encountered a classic dilemma: how to craft maps simple enough to be read but also complex enough to include several perspectives? In any case, the maps would not improve the political debate. The answer was not to aim for an intermediate point but to reshape the map itself as a device to gather pertinent audiences. So far, this article has referred to the 'general public', the 'human mass' or the 'citizens', as if they were a coherent body, but any attempt at science pedagogy would realise that this is a misguided conception. Venturini (2016: 76) puts it clearly: "there is no such thing as a homogeneous public [...], rather the public is a gaggle of ghosts provisionally assembled around a specific issue and by no means uniform by it". Before addressing any fictional pre-existing audience, CM must inquire who the actors concerned by each controversy are and what degree of complexity they are willing to handle. Following these considerations, CM is reformulated as a collective tool that depicts techno-scientific issues, brings together relevant actors, and allows them to contribute in the research process. It makes a big difference whether laypeople passively receive the enclosed cartographies or when they can position themselves in the maps and even propose further redefinitions of the issue described.

Art Exhibitions

Another pedagogical exercise that sensitises laypeople about the intersection of sciences and politics and the pivotal role of nonhumans is the Art Exhibitions (AE). As a matter of fact, once Latour stopped carrying out STS research, he dedicated himself to this type of work at the *Zentrum für Kunst und Medien* (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Germany. Some of the topics exposed included non-western deities, iconoclasm, the anthropology of the moderns, the ecological concept of 'critical zones' and, probably the most famous of Latour's exhibitions, the visualisation of non-human assemblies in *Making Things Public* (Latour and Weibel, 2005). In there, a group of philosophers, sociologists, engineers, and artists converged to craft and comment on several technological devices to open new lines of thought over the possibility of an 'object-oriented democracy'. The range of topics comprised quite diverse

themes such as diplomacy, multiculturalism, nationalism, psychometrics of audition and visualisation, ethology, astronomy, cybernetics, the atomic bomb, hydraulic systems, music and cinema, religious rites, and so much more. Whether this experience helped to crystallize the prior intentions of the Parliament of Things or not is beyond the point. AE, despite its political aspirations, remains a powerful tool to sensitise audiences over the relevance, presence and agency of nonhumans. In this framework, the transmission of knowledge is quite different from the disembodied discourses of epistemology, since the ontological component has a leading role in the AE. Also, as Hodgson, Vlieghe and Zamojski (2018) have suggested, the collective traits of the AE as a public event have a double effect – on the one hand, it advocates for more accessible intersections between the sciences, politics, arts, and citizens; on the other, it underlines the communal dynamics of science and technology, debunking the myth of the lonely genius.

AE have an advantage over CM since the centrality of the location helps to entwine more intimately the human and nonhuman collectives. While CM is effective in revealing the uncertainties and consensus of scientific research in the making, it has the risk of being locked in the domains of discourse by operating mainly with scientific bibliographies and other signs. AE, on the contrary, provides an opportunity where symbolic and tangible actors converge. This is by no means a minor detail. Koopal and Vlieghe (2002) following the premises of the Latourian ‘flat ontology’, indicate that AE is an intersectional practice that encompasses the visibility of infrastructure, the assembly of artefacts, the aesthetic value of technology, and human interaction with those nonhuman entities. Again, it might be questioned if witnessing the composition of techno-scientific devices is enough to render laypeople competent translators. In which sense a conscious and efficient user of artefacts can be counted as a legitimate spokesman for nonhumans? Still, as Pérez-Bustos (2015) has extensively reported, AE have more pedagogical potential than other methods when it comes to teaching young students about techno-science. Exposure to nonhumans, by itself, might be a sterile experience if it is not complemented by a didactic component. This is why interactive museums and science fairs are the best examples of how AE allows students to have a protagonist role in the process. Lastly, adding a feminist reflexion, Pérez-Bustos stresses that AE must be embedded in a pedagogical relationship not reduced solely to the transmission of knowledge but also including an interpersonal care bond.

Citizen Science

As previously reviewed, Latourian philosophy strives for the recognition of nonhumans as acting entities and their subsequent political representation. This is a request for politicians, sociologists, and citizens, since most scientists already acknowledge nonhumans as agents that must be taken into account. Scientific experts still hold a relevant position within the Parliament of Things since they are the most competent translators. The *quid* of the matter is whether laypeople might become suitable translators as well only by means of theoretical education and political awareness – Latour’s answer would be negative. Experimental practices are the royal road to acquire the type of 4E cognition that characterise scientific reasoning. Fortunately, experimentation is not the exclusive property of scientists, so many other human actors can produce and engage in experimental practices of their own. Citizen Science (CS) is, therefore, the most convenient interface where scientists and laypeople collaborate on a common experimental project. For Vohland (2021: 1) the broad definition of CS as “the active engagement of the general public in scientific research tasks” leads to multiple questions. Who is the general public? Do these research tasks aim to produce innovative knowledge? What are the funding sources for CS? Is it exploitative using underpaid citizens as research assistants? Are the results of CS considered for public policy? Certainly, CS is an emerging practice with many complications yet to be solved, but it is the best option so far to render possible the redefinition of scientific expertise as an interpreter.

Let’s consider, for instance, recent coral reef research in Hawaii with the participation of twenty-seven non-scientists (Camp et al., 2016). This project anticipated the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development proposed by the United Nations. It is hard to find a research field more intricate than ocean sciences, which includes quite dissimilar objects like sea life, communications infrastructure, plastic waste, tectonic plates, heat regulation, and so on. In the Hawaii experience, citizens contributed by gathering and analysing data – that is, identifying particular species of sponges, using standardised scales to measure reefs, and recording general observations. Of course, this was not an inherent skill of citizens but the result of a training program. At the end of the project, they commented that their knowledge about marine ecosystems had increased. They also became more conscious about the preservation of coral reef and started taking environmental-friendly actions such as recycling plastic or using natural sunscreen. Citizens even expressed their desire to be more politically active on ecological matters and longed to participate in further research. Is this not a lucid description of how the Parliament of Things would look like, at least in a very local context? How different from scientists are those citizens who have learned to classify using taxonomies and measure with scales? Are they not proper auxiliary interpreters for the scientific experts in their quest to speak in behalf of nonhumans?

Undoubtedly, CS is far from being a panacea. Three caveats could be raised at this point. First, as Jasanoff (2002) says, contemporary societies are increasingly aware of the role of technology and its risks and, unfortunately, this has led to a generalized concern about the complexity of science. How could CS projects seduce laypeople to participate? Should public engagement in research be seen as a civic right or as a duty? Any CS project that fails to properly define the actors to which it is directed might face the same problems already mentioned in the case of CM. Second, some scientists are reticent about CS, invoking concerns about whether the swift technical training is enough to replace a professional. This apprehension is baseless, yet it reveals the real problem – scientific experts still want to judge the competence of other actors. Dickerson-Lange (2016) comments that CS ought to be a two-fold experience, meaning that scientists also must learn something from citizens in the process. Citizens should also be included in the experimental design and discussion of results. Third, taking this last point to its final consequences, Stengers (2000) warns about the need of devices that close the gap between the concerns of the communities and the scientific networks. Yet, those devices are not harmonic but rather agonistic, since the expert's theories and explanations must be defied by the very citizens. If laypeople cannot use their own modalities to turn the scientific discourse upside down, they won't be able to use the research projects as a platform to connect their particular interests with political legislation.

Certainly, connecting the laboratory and the agora did not intend to ease the labour of crafting knowledge, technology, and the social fabric. Re-conceptualizing the expert as a pedagogical figure who teaches laypeople how to translate the voice of nonhumans is a key step in the alignment of science and politics. This is not just a noble cause to follow, but an urgent one, since the contemporary world needs to regain trust in science and create new forms of research to sufficiently respond to the demands of the new climate regime. Scientists must abandon their old preaching style and start collaborating with the general public to compose the world to come.

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Spectrum of Gender Self-Presentations among Women Candidates

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ABSTRACT

In the 2018 U.S. midterm elections, Democratic women, especially those from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, were elected in record numbers. Drawing on qualitative website and Twitter bio data, this paper examines twenty key races at varying levels that had women candidates. We extend our previously-developed typology of gender self-presentations by classifying these approaches on a spectrum, ranging from gender traditional on one side to feminist on the other (with gender neutral and gender nontraditional in the middle). Illustrating the utility of this typology by applying it to a variety of races in the 2018 U.S. midterm elections, we extend prior work and suggest that gender nontraditional and feminist self-presentations highlight women candidates' power and agency.

Keywords: women candidates, politics, elections, gender and politics, self-presentation

INTRODUCTION

The 2018 U.S. elections were characterized by many representational “firsts” in terms of the path-breaking diversity among the candidates elected to office. Women won more seats in Congress than ever before, with 25 women serving in the Senate, and 101 women (with a record 43 women of color) serving in the House of Representatives (Center for American Women and Politics, 2023). More openly lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans people were elected than previously, including Colorado’s Jared Polis (D; the first openly gay governor to be elected in any state) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-Arizona; the first woman U.S. Senator from her state and first openly bisexual U.S. Senator in the country; Zraick, 2018). Likewise, Ilhan Omar (D-Minnesota) and Rashida Tlaib (D-Michigan) were the first Muslim women elected to Congress (Zraick, 2018).

Women also made inroads into male political space in executive positions, which are often more difficult to obtain because candidates have to appeal to a wider constituency. To be elected in U.S. state-wide elections, candidates need to appeal to rural, urban and suburban voters, who often represent more varied ideological perspectives. Sixty-one women filed as candidates for governor in 2018, which was double the 2014 rate (Center for American Women and Politics, 2018). In the statewide elections for executive seats, nine women were elected as Governors (including incumbents), seven as Attorney Generals, and 11 as state-level Secretaries of State (Michigan made history by electing women for all three; Center for American Women and Politics, 2023). There were eight open, non-incumbent seats for governor with women candidates (Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, New Mexico, South Dakota, and Wyoming; See [Table 1](#)), five of whom were elected (Kansas, Maine, Michigan, New Mexico, and South Dakota; See [Table 1](#)), and three of whom became the first woman governors of their state (Maine, South Dakota, and Iowa; Center for American Women and Politics, 2018). A record number of women were also elected to state legislatures, increasing the nationwide total by 29 percent from just two years

Table 1. Summary of Continuum of Women’s Gender Self-Presentations

	Gender Traditional	Gender Neutral	Gender Nontraditional	Feminist
Brief Description	Stereotypical feminine gender roles, such as caretakers, family-oriented, and listeners	Gender blind perspectives, accomplishments or policy positions	Stereotypical masculine gender roles, language or traits, such as swearing, toughness and fighters	Focus on women’s social and political interests as women, women’s political issues, an awareness of gender inequalities and patriarchy

earlier (Center for American Women and Politics, 2018). By 2019, women comprised a historically unprecedented 28.9 percent of all state legislators, with 25.5 percent of these women of color (Center for American Women and Politics, 2018).

The 2018 election year was exceptional for several reasons. In addition to women candidates being elected to office in record numbers, women politicians and voters played a significant role in flipping the U.S. House to a Democratic majority. Women of color challenged electoral biases and were elected in districts with a majority of white voters. Additionally, mothers of young children and young women challenged norms by running for office. Finally, in the words of Dittmar (2019), women “embraced gender as an electoral asset instead of a hurdle to overcome”. That is, in contrast to previous years, in which women candidates typically emphasized gender neutral self-presentations, 2018 was the first election cycle to witness broad-scale attention to women’s gender as an advantage rather than a liability (Aronson and Fleming, 2023). In fact, this election paved the way for subsequent elections in terms of both the demographics of candidates and their gender self-presentations (Aronson and Fleming, 2023).

Previous research has typically examined gender self-presentations in narrow, gender dichotomous ways. This approach highlights whether women candidates embrace or reject gender stereotypes and often obscures the full complexity of self-presentations. Elsewhere, we developed an innovative theoretical framework for understanding the gender self-presentations of U.S. candidates (Aronson, Oldham and Lucas, 2020). In that work, we suggest that viewing gender self-presentations on a spectrum more accurately reflects nuances in how candidates present themselves to voters. In the present paper, we build on and extend our previous work on this spectrum of gender self-presentations among candidates by considering a broader number of races and their election outcomes. In doing so, we compare election results of those candidates who drew on a wider and more multifaceted range of gender self-presentations to those whose self-presentations were more narrow. In a political context in which gender continues to matter significantly, this application of our theoretical framework contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how politics is gendered.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women candidates at all levels face a no-win situation: many voters view them negatively if they violate gender stereotypes or if they are portrayed as too nurturing and sensitive (Bauer, 2015; Dittmar, 2015). As a result of the masculinity assumed in politics, women candidates and their strategists carefully weigh whether to draw on, minimize, or challenge gender stereotypes in their campaigns (Dittmar, 2015). In fact, they often aim to strike a “balance” between “feminine and masculine traits and issues” when it comes to both self-presentation and policy stances (Dittmar, 2015: 81).

Previous studies find that women candidates running for executive offices typically adopt a “masculine” campaign style that emphasizes “toughness” and experience in male domains like defense, while minimizing attention to women’s issues (Carroll, 2009; Dittmar, 2015). At the same time, in order to conform to norms surrounding femininity, women candidates pay close attention to their tone (i.e., “to be tough but not mean”) and appearance (i.e., dress professionally to “neutralize gender”; Dittmar, 2015: 89, 105). They may even have an advantage when they conform to gender norms that emphasize “feminine” traits such as honesty and authenticity, or highlight their “outsider” status (Dittmar, 2015). Some studies suggest that women candidates appeal to women voters when they emphasize stereotypical women’s issues, such as education and child care (Herrnson et al., 2003) and that their websites are typically more likely to be “congruent” than “incongruent” with gender stereotypes (Schneider, 2014). “Feminine stereotypes” emphasize women’s traits as “warm, nurturing, and sensitive” or “communal” (Bauer, 2015, p.691). In contrast, “masculine” traits are “aggressive,” “agentic” (Bauer, 2015) or focus on “leadership” (Schneider, 2014: 265). “Strategic stereotype theory” suggests that candidates draw on gender stereotypes that provide them benefits (Fridkin and Kenney, 2015). For women, this could involve strategically drawing on stereotypes that women are caring (Fridkin and Kenney, 2015).

Yet West and Zimmerman (1987: 125) theorized that “doing gender” can be complex and involves a “routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction.” As in person, online gender self-presentations are also “performed” and represent an “accomplishment” (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Despite this complexity, prior

studies of women in politics emphasize a gender dichotomy, where candidates either draw on or reject gender stereotypes. This dichotomous way of understanding gender in electoral politics fails to capture the full range of possible self-presentations. The 2018 midterm elections were distinct in the ways that women candidates were “doing gender” in their campaigns. Across the U.S. and for a wide range of races, advertisements featured candidates pregnant or breastfeeding, highlighted their experiences with sexual assault or harassment, emphasized their military credentials, or showed images of them protesting Trump’s inauguration (Aronson and Fleming, 2023). Dittmar (2019) examines several notable examples of 2018 campaign messages that “draw upon distinctly gendered experiences.”

Although prior research suggests that women candidates can counteract gender stereotypes, it emphasizes gender dichotomies and does not examine a full range of gender self-presentations or how they are combined. One exception is Lawrence and her collaborators (2016: 203, 197), whose study of three women candidates found a “hybridized” and “diverse strategic deployment of femininity,” some of which was traditional and some of which challenged traditional gender roles. Thus, while previous research focuses on stereotypical self-presentations (e.g., Dittmar, 2015; Herrnson et al., 2003; Lawrence et al., 2016; McGregor et al., 2017; Meeks, 2016), examinations of a full range of gender self-presentations in campaigns remains understudied. The present paper pushes this analysis forward by applying our spectrum of gender self-presentations to understand 2018 U.S. women candidates’ self-presentations on social media and websites.

In our previous work, we build on feminist theory to expand our understanding of self-presentations beyond a masculine-feminine dichotomy. In particular, we draw on classic work by Ferree and Hess (1994: 131), who define gender consciousness as “politicized consciousness or identification of women as a group with common interests and a collective identity as women.” Scholars have extended Ferree and Hess’ (1994) definition to posit that women can be classified on a continuum of consciousness and identification, ranging from traditional on one side to feminist on the other (Aronson, 2017). That is, conservative women’s activism affirms gender-traditional roles, yet progressive activists may also draw on gender-traditional frames for strategic purposes or blend traditional and nontraditional views of gender (Aronson, 2017). For example, the Mexican American community activists in Pardo’s (1995) study did not identify as feminists, and they both reinforced and altered traditional self-definitions of what it means to be a woman through their activism. In addition, despite empowering women and making visible women’s previously invisible health concerns, some activists within the breast cancer movement distance themselves from a feminist label and instead reify gender differences (Blackstone, 2004). As Naples (1991: 490) argued in her study of women community workers in low-income neighborhoods, there are “contradictions between women’s performance of traditional female roles and the revolutionary actions they take on behalf of their families and communities.”

Likewise, while some women embrace a feminist identity, defined as alternative visions for gender relations based on a collective identity, others reject gender inequality but do not identify themselves as feminists (Aronson, 2017). Historically, women of color, working class women, and lesbians were excluded from the second wave women’s movement and have argued at times that the movement does not address their concerns (e.g., Collins, 1991; Ferree and Hess, 1994; Reger, 2012). Research also suggests that contemporary young women often exhibit an awareness of inequalities while rejecting a feminist identity (Aronson, 2017).

Seeing women’s activism along a continuum provides a model for our work on women political candidates. This approach is more useful than previous dichotomous understandings because it recognizes greater nuance and the potential to blend different approaches. Places on the continuum represent an Ideal Type in that they are theoretically distinct despite their complexity in real life.

Our prior examination found that most candidates drew on multiple self-presentation approaches. Starting with two ends of a continuum, traditional and feminist, our prior work developed a typology that represents multiple points on a gender self-presentation spectrum and applied them to the 2020 U.S. Democratic presidential primary election (Aronson, Oldham and Lucas, 2020). This research found that for both men and women candidates, traditional self-presentations were the least common and gender neutral self-presentations were the most common. Women’s nontraditional self-presentations were broader than men’s, which tended to stay solely in the domain of fatherhood. While both male and female candidates emphasized feminist issues, the men often did so while simultaneously drawing on traditionally masculine language or highlighting gender stereotypes as male protectors. Overall, we found that women’s self-presentations were wider and more multifaceted than men’s (Aronson, Oldham and Lucas, 2020).

Although our prior research advances our understanding of the spectrum of gender self-presentations in elections, it only covers one primary race in a progressive party. It also does not consider how self-presentations might be linked to election outcomes. The present paper applies concepts from this spectrum to the 2018 U.S. midterm elections. In doing so, we expand the number, level, and political party of the races considered. We focus on women candidates and also consider the election outcomes in the races examined.

In this paper, we analyze gendered self-presentations in the pivotal 2018 elections. As we will see, all of the candidates examined here strategically blended self-presentations. Our approach aims to capture how “elites” and institutional actors in politics “facilitate a movement’s ability to produce cultural change” (Van Dyke and Taylor, 2018). We view candidates’ self-presentations as both reflective of, and creating, women’s movement frames (Aronson and Fleming, 2023). As such, self-presentations have the potential to create broader change through cultural diffusion (Aronson and Fleming, 2023; Van Dyke and Taylor, 2018). In the analysis that follows, we thus ask the following research questions: how do women running for governor in 2018 in open seat elections, and those running for key executive and legislative offices in the swing state of Michigan, self-present gender in their campaign websites and Twitter bios? To what extent do these self-presentations fit into gender traditional, neutral, nontraditional and/or feminist perspectives? Finally, what were the election outcomes based on the self-presentations adopted by each candidate?

METHODS

We examine gender self-presentations in the 2018 U.S. midterm elections in two main areas: 1) all 8 of the open U.S. gubernatorial seats that had women candidates in 2018¹ and 2) the state of Michigan as a case study². Nineteen of the 20 races featured men as opponents; for the one race with two women candidates, we analyze both candidates’ self-presentations. We examine gubernatorial races because there were a record number of women running for this office in 2018. We focus on Michigan because it was an epicenter of the political divisions facing the country. In the 2016 primary election, Democratic voters nominated Bernie Sanders over Hillary Clinton, yet Donald Trump won the general election in the state. Michigan is also an ideal case study as a result of its geographic, political, and racial and ethnic diversity. It has a major urban center, Detroit, with high income suburbs, as well as major university towns, and many rural communities. Thus, Congressional candidates within the state faced vastly different electoral constituencies. In 2018, voters in Michigan’s “pink wave” elected a woman for Governor, Senate, Attorney General, Secretary of State, and five U.S. House of Representatives seats; the new Attorney General is the first openly gay person to hold a statewide elected office. While state-wide and Congressional elections differ in their constituencies, studying these races together allows for a broader range of candidates to be considered, including those of diverse religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as sexual orientation.

We conducted a qualitative content analysis of owned digital platforms, specifically campaign websites and Twitter bios, for the candidates studied. For the websites, we examined candidate accounts that were live in October 2018. Although other aspects of the websites reveal how the candidates represent particular issues in their campaigns, we focus our analysis on the website bios, which contain the most information about self-presentation. The Twitter bios, which were not part of the original data collection and were added to this study later, were collected in April 2019. As a result of their later inclusion in the study, we examined both personal and professional Twitter accounts.

For the Twitter bios, we used each word included on the candidates’ biography as our unit of analysis. For the candidate websites, we used each sentence as our unit of analysis. Each data source was coded by two researchers to assess inter-rater reliability. For the Twitter bio classification, there was 93.75% agreement between the two raters. For the website sentence classification, there was 96.9% agreement between the two raters.

Due to the short nature of the Twitter bios, we created a simple yes-no classification to evaluate whether or not each candidate used labels that fit into each self-presentation on the spectrum (See [Tables 1 and 2](#)). For the websites, which contain more text, we were able to complete a more comprehensive analysis. We counted all of the self-presentations on each website, keeping in mind that each sentence could contain multiple self-presentations on the spectrum (Only 12 out of 445 sentences were classified in multiple ways.). For the website analysis, we examined the percentage of different self-presentations present for each candidate (See [Table 2](#)). As we will explain, the categories on the spectrum are distinct and divergent from each other, however most candidates blended multiple self-presentation approaches. Finally, we examined election outcomes.

The analysis of data started inductively with open coding for major themes. That is, these modes of self-presentation emerged from the candidate websites and Twitter bios. We used qualitative data analysis methods to enter codes, highlight passages of text, and examine co-occurrences of codes. The coding scheme and analytical framework was continually refined throughout the analytic process (Miles and Huberman 1994). In particular, we classified self-presentations according to a full spectrum of possible approaches: traditional, neutral, nontraditional, or feminist (See [Table 1](#)).

¹ Michigan, Georgia, New Mexico, South Dakota, Kansas, Maine, Wyoming, and Idaho.

² Attorney General, Secretary of State, Senate and the seven Congressional races that had women candidates.

Table 2. Candidates' Twitter and Website Gender Self-Presentations (Part 1)

Candidate	Party	Race	Seat Type*	Outcome (Win or Loss)	Political Party Flip or Same (Previous Party)	Twitter Traditional (Y/N)	Twitter Neutral (Y/N)	Twitter Nontraditional (Y/N)	Twitter Feminist (Y/N)
Abrams	D-GA	GOV	O	L	Same (R)	N	Y	Y	N
Grisham	D-NM	GOV	O	W	Flip (R)	Y	Y	N	N
Jordan	D-ID	GOV	O	L	Same (R)	Y	Y	Y	N
Kelly	D-KS	GOV	O	W	Flip (R)	Y	Y	N	N
Mills	D-ME	GOV	O	W	Flip (R)	Y	Y	N	N
Noem	R-SD	GOV	O	W	Same (R)	Y	Y	Y	N
Throne	D-WY	GOV	O	L	Same (R)	Y	Y	N	N
Whitmer	D-MI	GOV	O	W	Flip (R)	Y	Y	N	N
Benson	D-MI	SOS	O	W	Flip (R)	Y	Y	Y	N
Nessel	D-MI	AG	O	W	Flip (R)	N	Y	N	N
Stabenow	D-MI	SEN	I	W	Same (D)	N	Y	N	N
Albro	D-MI	CON-3	C	L	Same (R)	N	Y	Y	N
Bizon	D-MI	CON-10	C	L	Same (R)	N	Y	N	N
Dingell	D-MI	CON-12	I	W	Same (D)	N	Y	N	N
Driskell	D-MI	CON-7	C	L	Same (R)	N	Y	N	N
Epstein	R-MI	CON-11	O	L	Flip (D)	N	Y	Y	N
Lawrence	D-MI	CON-14	I	W	Same (D)	N	Y	Y	N
Slotkin	D-MI	CON-8	C	W	Flip (R)	N	Y	Y	N
Stevens	D-MI	CON-11	O	W	Flip (R)	N	Y	Y	N
Tlaib	D-MI	CON-13	O	W	Same (D)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Total (20)						45% (9)	100% (20)	50% (10)	5% (1)

* O=Open, I=Incumbent and C=Challenger

Table 2. Candidates' Twitter and Website Gender Self-Presentations (Part 2)

Candidate	Total # of perspectives on websites	% Website # Traditional (N)	% Website # Neutral (N)	% Website # Nontraditional (N)	% Website # Feminist (N)
Abrams	27	0	96.3% (26)	0	3.7% (1)
Grisham	12	16.7% (2)	66.7% (8)	8.3% (1)	8.3% (1)
Jordan	11	18.2% (2)	45.5% (5)	36.4% (4)	0
Kelly	28	14.3% (4)	71.4% (20)	14.3% (4)	0
Mills	29	24.1% (7)	48.3% (14)	17.2% (5)	10.3% (3)
Noem	10	30% (3)	60% (6)	10% (1)	0
Throne	14	21.4% (3)	78.6% (11)	0	0
Whitmer	28	14.3% (4)	57.1% (16)	17.9% (5)	10.7% (3)
Benson	11	27.3% (3)	72.7% (8)	0	0
Nessel	31	3.2% (1)	61.3% (19)	0	35.5% (11)
Stabenow	42	9.5% (4)	83.3% (35)	4.8% (2)	2.4% (1)
Albro	37	10.8% (4)	73% (27)	16.2% (6)	0
Bizon	15	0	80% (12)	20% (3)	0
Dingell	25	8% (2)	68% (17)	0	24% (6)
Driskell	33	12.1% (4)	84.8% (28)	3% (1)	0
Epstein	11	0	100% (11)	0	0
Lawrence	15	20% (3)	66.7% (10)	0	13.3% (2)
Slotkin	32	15.6% (5)	46.9% (15)	37.5% (12)	0
Stevens	21	4.8% (1)	95.2% (20)	0	0
Tlaib	13	7.7% (1)	46.2% (6)	30.8% (4)	15.4% (2)
Total (20)	445	11.9% (53)	70.6% (314)	10.8% (48)	6.7% (30)

FINDINGS

Traditional Self-Presentations

Women candidates are subjected to judgment based on their appearance much more than men candidates, and the candidates considered here were aware of and sometimes denounced this double standard (Aronson and Fleming, 2023). At the same time, these candidates sometimes emphasized stereotypically feminine gender roles, such as their caretaking and family obligations (See [Table 1](#)). They also presented themselves as “listeners,” which fits into a gender traditional framework. However, women in politics face a “classic double bind,” as stereotypical gender self-presentations can be risky and make a candidate appear “incompetent” (Meeks 2016; Lawrence et al., 2016; McGregor, 2017). The 2018 candidates avoided this problem by blending their traditional self-presentations with feminist and non-traditional ones. Democratic women candidates also put gender-traditional issues at the forefront of their campaigns, including health care, education, and early childhood education (Aronson and Fleming, 2023).

Twitter bios

As a distinctly American electoral winner-take-all process, gubernatorial races obviously take place within established political structures. As such, candidates must have widespread voter appeal. In fact, traditional appeals to voters in ideologically conservative states suggests that the deployment of traditional self-presentations may be strategic. Our analysis of Twitter Bios revealed that forty-five percent (n=9) of the 20 candidates used gender traditional labels to represent themselves in their Twitter bios (See [Table 2](#)). Seven of the 8 gubernatorial candidates, who were primarily from conservative or Republican states, used traditional gender descriptors in their Twitter bios. For example, Gretchen Whitmer, of Michigan, claimed the “mom” label in both her personal and official gubernatorial account. Her primary account simply stated “49th Governor of Michigan. Proud mom.” This gender-traditional self-presentation, which also appeared on her campaign website, established her maternal qualities and reinforced her ability to act as a caretaker of the state. Similarly, in her personal account, Laura Kelly of Kansas, used “wife,” “mother,” “champion for kids,” and “Governor of Kansas” to describe herself, in that order. In ideologically conservative states such as these, the use of traditional self-presentations may be strategic.

The order in which the self-presentations are listed on the Twitter bios also matters. For example, Michelle Lujan Grisham of New Mexico listed her traditional labels before her work labels. Her official governor account calls herself “mother,” “grandmother,” and “dog owner,” followed by her title as the Governor of New Mexico. In her personal account, she listed her status as a “grandmother” first, and then her New Mexican identity, the latter of which has local appeal to voters. In the fourth and final label, she stated that she is the “32nd Governor of New Mexico.” Similarly, Mary Throne of Wyoming, also used traditional labels, but unlike Kelly and Whitmer, she listed her work experience first: “Wyoming Public Service Commission, Deputy Chair, lover of all things Wyoming. Mother of 3 wonderful sons, grateful wife of Kevin.”

These four gubernatorial candidates portrayed the most traditional gender self-presentations. This approach appears to be strategic, as three of the four states voted Republican in the 2016 presidential election. Conservative and Republican voters are more comfortable with traditional gender roles (Khazan, 2017) and such self-presentations have the potential to win over such voters.

Candidate websites

Overall, 11.9 percent (n=53) of the total number of perspectives on the candidate websites are classified as traditional self-presentations (See [Table 2](#)). This number ranged from 0 on the low end (Abrams, Bizon and Epstein) to 30 percent on the high end (Noem; see [Table 2](#)). Many of the candidates highlighted their immediate family on their websites, including listing the names of their children and grandchildren. Senator Debbie Stabenow’s website stated: “She has two grown children, Todd and Michelle; a daughter-in-law, Sara; a son-in-law, Scott; and five amazing grandchildren.” Similarly, Maine’s Governor Janet Mills’ website stated: “Janet and Stan moved back to Farmington, and she became a full-time mom to five daughters who she helped raise while working full-time herself. She is now the proud grandmother to three grandsons and a granddaughter.” Throne of Wyoming said: “With her husband, Kevin Boyce, she started her family in Cheyenne.” Kelly of Kansas emphasized her relationship with her husband: “Laura and her husband Ted Daughety, a doctor of pulmonary and sleep disorders, live in Topeka and have been married for 34 years.” Several candidates also emphasized caring for other family members. For example, Whitmer stated: “During her first term in the state legislature, Gretchen took care of her mother at the end of her life while giving birth to and caring for her first daughter.”

Some candidates drew on their family credentials to emphasize their approach to policy. Mills emphasized the connection between her husband’s death and her stance on health care: “After a devastating stroke, Stan passed away in 2014. In the last year of his life, Janet learned firsthand what thousands of Maine families go through every year. ... This is why Janet is so determined to ensure that every Maine person and every Maine family has access

to affordable, high-quality health care.” Similarly, Kelly linked her experiences “as a mom” to her commitment to affordable child care. These examples suggest that candidates highlight gender traditional roles as a form of experience that shaped their policy positions.

Candidates also emphasized their skills as “listeners,” a traditionally feminine quality. For example, Congresswoman Elissa Slotkin stated: “I will *listen* to you, make a plan to improve your lives in concrete ways” (emphasis ours). Similarly, Governor Whitmer’s website discusses her campaign trail as follows: “That’s why she’s visited all 83 counties in Michigan to *listen* to community members about the issues that they’re facing” (emphasis ours). This role as “listeners” reinforces gendered expectations.

In sum, traditional self-presentations centered on candidates’ roles as mothers, wives, caregivers, and “listeners.” While almost half of the candidates use traditional self-presentations for their Twitter bios, only about 1 in 10 of the website sentences have gender traditional elements. This finding may reflect the limited number of words available on the Twitter bios, as candidates must carefully select the words that best represent the images that they want to convey. At the same time, successful candidates did not stay within a traditional framework; they drew on the ideological spectrum of self-presentations to strategically craft a complex and multifaceted image.

Neutral Self-Presentations

In gender neutral self-presentations, candidates downplayed their gender and instead emphasized their accomplishments or policy positions. These accomplishments typically sought to downplay the importance of gender in the campaign in order to have widespread voter appeal. It is especially notable that all of the Twitter bios and nearly three-quarters of the website perspectives include gender neutral language. This approach was typically blended with others in order to create a multi-faceted self-presentation. In fact, prior work reveals that gender-neutral self-presentations provided a space for the support of voters, especially men, who do not embrace feminist and non-traditional self-presentations (Aronson and Fleming, 2023).

Twitter bios

In their Twitter bios, all of the candidates included gender neutral or gender blind labels as a part of their self-description. Thirty percent of the candidates we analyzed used exclusively gender neutral language, featuring instead their political identities and accomplishments. For example, Dana Nessel’s Twitter bios, both personal and official, were completely gender neutral. “Michigan Attorney General” is the only label on her personal account, and her official account is equally straightforward. She used the bio to set a serious and accomplished tone, which aligned with her elected position. This approach stood in sharp contrast to her notable campaign advertisement, where she dramatically emphasized gender by encouraging people to vote for the candidate “without a penis” (Schwartz, 2017).

Similarly, incumbent Congresswoman Debbie Dingell also kept her profile gender neutral. As she put it: “Proudly serving the people of Michigan’s 12th Congressional District.” Likewise, incumbent Senator Debbie Stabenow’s profile simply read, “Representing the people from the Great State of Michigan in the United States Senate.” The rest of the candidates included other descriptors alongside gender neutral ones. For example, Gretchen Driskell of Michigan listed a series of work identities, including “Former Congressional Candidate,” “Commercial Realtor,” “Former State Rep 52nd District,” and “Former Mayor of Saline, MI.” Although Michigan’s 2018 “Pink Wave” received a lot of attention and put gender at the forefront in the races, many candidates appeared to strategically create gender neutral self-presentations in order to have broad appeal in an ideologically diverse swing-state (See [Table 2](#)).

Candidate websites

Like the Twitter bios, every candidate used neutral self-presentations on their websites. In fact, 70.6 percent (n=314) of the self-presentations were classified as neutral. In particular, many candidates featured lengthy paragraphs about their policy positions and/or accomplishments during their political careers. Senator Stabenow said: “She authored the bipartisan 2014 Farm Bill, which streamlined over 100 programs, saving more than \$80 billion and making historic investments in Michigan agriculture, small towns, and local food systems.” Similarly, Kimberly Bizon of Michigan stated her policy positions: “She will push to revitalize and reinvent our community colleges to train a new generation of students for high-tech manufacturing jobs that can be created in the Thumb [of Michigan] and keep our talent right here at home.”

Another type of neutral self-presentation highlighted educational attainment accomplishments. For example, Slotkin emphasized her Ivy League education: “After college at Cornell University and a few years working for non-profit organizations, I went to graduate school at Columbia University in New York City.” Similarly, Congresswoman Haley Stevens’ website stated: “She earned a master’s degree in social policy and philosophy and a bachelor’s degree in political science from American University with honors and distinction.” This approach draws voters’ attention to the merit of the candidate and their qualifications for political leadership.

Nontraditional Self-Presentations

The 2018 candidates also displayed gender non-traditional self-presentations. These candidates drew on women's movement frames in their demonstration of anger toward inequalities (Aronson and Fleming, 2023). They also assumed stereotypically masculine gender roles, by using aggressive language (sometimes even swearing), and by presenting themselves as “tough” and “fighters.” Swearing, and the anger behind it, deviates from gender stereotypes and is typically not accepted for women politicians. This approach also included nontraditional career experiences, such as work in traditionally male occupations. Although research before the 2018 election assumes that women candidates face a no-win situation (Bauer, 2015; Burns, Eberhardt and Merolla, 2013; Dittmar, 2015), 2018 saw new ways for candidates to present themselves (Aronson and Fleming, 2023).

Twitter bios

Half of the Twitter bios included nontraditional self-presentations, especially the word “fighter” (See [Table 2](#)). In an assessment of political candidates, Klein (2019) described that while “men are assumed to be fighters. ... Women have to overcome suspicions of weakness, which means they have to be much more explicit about their willingness to fight.” Mills, Lawrence and Jordan all labeled themselves as “fighters.” For example, Mills, running in Maine, wrote she would “*Fight* for affordable health care, a stronger economy, and a world-class education for all Maine kids” (emphasis ours). Similarly, Congresswoman Brenda Lawrence had a neutral Twitter bio except for the word “fight.” Cathy Albro, also running for Congress, had a gender neutral bio, except for the word “fighter.” Although one might claim that the term “fight” is ubiquitous in politics and therefore not gendered, we argue that it should be viewed as gender nontraditional. “Fighting” goes against gender stereotypes that view women politicians as cooperative and getting along well with others.

Many of the candidates blended traditional and nontraditional labels in their Twitter bios. Paulette Jordan, from Idaho, first identified as “Country *strong*,” a non-traditional self-presentation, followed by the traditional “proud mom.” Jordan also included the non-traditional career self-presentation of “Business Founder/Exec”. She closed with “*fighting* for Idaho always” (emphasis ours).

Similarly, Republican Kristi Noem, who ran for Governor in South Dakota, used the traditional feminine descriptors “wife” and “mom” as well as her state identity in her gubernatorial account. In her personal account, she included “wife,” and “mother,” but also described herself as a “farmer,” “rancher,” and “small business owner,” traditionally masculine occupations. While many of the other gubernatorial candidates in Republican states focused on gender traditional labels, Noem's nontraditional ones stand out. Likewise, Jocelyn Benson, Michigan's new Secretary of State, used a blend of labels. She listed her primary identity as “mom.” Her second label was “Michigan Secretary of State,” and her third was “marathoner,” a nontraditional self-presentation. Benson was a dedicated runner, averaging two marathons per year. She made headlines after completing the Boston Marathon while eight months pregnant (The Detroit News, 2016).

Similarly, Stacey Abrams, who ran for Governor in Georgia, presented gender in a nontraditional way in her Twitter bio. In her post-campaign account, she named herself first as a founder of two voter equality organizations, then as an author, and then as the founder of two apps, and closed with her ghostwriting alias. Her bio is distinct in that it excludes any specific mention of gender, but still painted a strong contrast between her identity as a founder and entrepreneur and her identity as a writer of romantic suspense novels. Slotkin, who unseated a Republican in her run for Congress in Michigan, presented herself solely in gender neutral and gender nontraditional ways: “Proud Michigander. Representative #MI08. Former Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense, @CIA.”

Michigan Congressional District 11 was unique in that it featured two women on the ballot in the general election: Stevens (D) and Lena Epstein (R). In their Twitter bios, both drew on multiple self-presentations, including gender nontraditional. Stevens' bio began with her new title, “Congresswoman for MI-11. Metro-Detroit,” and then stated “Millennial. Woman in manufacturing. Passionate advocate. Here to work for you!” She was the only candidate to use a generational label and used her work identity to portray a nontraditional gender self-presentation that is connected with a strong state identity. Manufacturing (particularly the auto industry) has a long history in Michigan, and is historically male dominated. Stevens' opponent, Epstein also blended traditional and nontraditional self-presentations: “Business Leader,” “Conservative,” and “Wife & Mother.” The latter traditional self-presentations are often expected from a Republican candidate in a conservative district. In sum, half of the candidates utilized gender nontraditional self-presentations in their Twitter bios, blending these them with other approaches on the spectrum.

Candidate websites

The 2018 election in general, and gubernatorial races in particular, were distinct because women candidates did not shy away from traditionally masculine language, images, emotions, or assertiveness. This type of anger breaks

out of gender stereotypes for women. In doing so, they often captured, and propelled forward, the anger of voters, especially women and people of color (Aronson and Fleming, 2023).

Almost 11 percent ($n=48$) of the website self-presentations could be classified as nontraditional, ranging from 0 to 37.5%, depending on the candidate. Yet eight candidates did not utilize gender nontraditional self-presentations at all (See [Table 2](#)). For example, Whitmer stated on her website: “She’ll *fight* for the things that matter to people and put them first” (emphasis ours). Similarly, Albro stated that she: “has made it her life’s work to *fight* for the health and education of our nation’s children” (emphasis ours). Likewise, Driskell said: “I’ll *fight* to stop foreign trade deals like TPP that outsource our jobs, fix bad deals like NAFTA that have forced our kids to leave Michigan to find work, and *fight* to protect Medicare and Social Security” (emphasis ours). Jordan linked “fighting” with her Native American heritage: “proud member of the Coeur d’Alene tribe, I was raised to *fight* for the needs of my community and to protect our priceless natural resources” (emphasis ours). Finally, Tlaib, known nationally for saying “we’re going to impeach the motherfucker” at her swearing in, used “fighter” language: “Rashida has an unparalleled record *fighting* for her constituents and her values, taking on billionaires and multinational corporations, and winning” (emphasis ours). Although not featured directly on her website, Whitmer made “fix the *damn* roads” a central campaign slogan (Aronson and Fleming, 2023).

The candidates used other nontraditional language on their websites, such as “roll up her sleeves.” Albro’s website says: “Cathy is ready to *roll up her sleeves* and get to work building the social movement towards civility, respect, and a balance of power in our beloved country” (emphasis ours). Tlaib put it similarly, “she will *roll up her sleeves* to make sure her residents are cared for, no matter how big the challenge” (emphasis ours). While this image is not inherently masculine, it does conjure up a picture of a man rolling up his button down dress shirt sleeves in order to get to work immediately on important issues.

Gender nontraditional self-presentations included the “tough” self-presentation of Slotkin, who campaigned as a former CIA analyst and defeated a Republican male incumbent in a close race. Slotkin had the highest use of nontraditional self-presentations on her website, at nearly 40 percent (see [Table 2](#)). Slotkin: “I would join the intelligence community and work to prevent future terrorist attacks against the United States. I was recruited to join the Central Intelligence Agency as a Middle East analyst, and within a year of joining the agency, I was deployed to Baghdad to serve alongside America’s soldiers and diplomats, doing my part to help in a very complicated war. I served a total of three tours in Iraq over a span of five years.” This deviation from stereotypical gender self-presentations was blended with other approaches to highlight a multifaceted appeal to voters. In a context in which women candidates pushed back against the status quo, research suggests that many voters, especially women, supported these nontraditional roles and candidates’ anger (Aronson and Fleming, 2023).

Feminist Self-Presentations

Embedded within feminist self-presentations was an emphasis on women’s collective power, the recognition of the intersection between electoral politics and the #MeToo movement, and an awareness of intersectional feminism. Reflecting larger social and cultural changes that were underway, many candidates also used explicitly feminist self-presentations (Aronson and Fleming, 2023). Feminist self-presentations are classified as such because they emphasize women’s social and political interests as women and/or include an awareness of gender inequalities and patriarchy (Aronson, 2017). This approach was undertaken least often in our study: only 1 candidate featured a feminist self-presentation in her Twitter bio and 6.7 percent ($n=30$) of the website self-presentations were classified as feminist. However, the presence of these self-presentations, while lower than the others, is notable.

Twitter bios

One type of feminist self-presentation is an emphasis on women’s issues. Tlaib was the only candidate who explicitly used feminist language in her Twitter bio. In her personal account, Tlaib referenced the campaign slogan and autobiography title of Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman elected to Congress, and the first woman to run for the Democratic presidential nomination, when she called herself “Unbossed Congresswoman.” Tlaib’s second label is “Mama working for justice,” suggesting an activist approach that is linked with motherhood. Suggesting a feminist intersectional perspective, she mentioned her ethnic identity (“Palestinian American”) and religious identity (“Proud Muslima”). This explicitly feminist self-presentation fit within Tlaib’s district, which historically favors Democrats by a very wide margin. In this context, she presented feminist ideology and activism and an intersectional identity in ways that many candidates likely were not able to do as a result of efforts to appeal to a more conservative voter base.

Candidate websites

Nearly half of the candidates (9 of 20) explicitly utilized feminist self-presentations on their websites, which covered 6.7 percent ($n=30$) of the website self-presentations. Many candidates emphasized women’s issues, including the #MeToo movement. Whitmer made public, and drew on, her own experiences with sexual assault

Table 3. Gender Self-Presentations on Websites in Open and Challenger Races

	Total # of perspectives on websites	% Website # Traditional (N)	% Website # Neutral (N)	% Website # Nontraditional (N)	% Website # Feminist (N)
Governor's Races Flip (R to D, N=4)*	97	17.5% (17)	59.8% (58)	15.5% (15)	7.2% (7)
Governor's Races Same (R to R, N=4)	62	12.9% (8)	77.4% (48)	8.1% (5)	1.6% (1)
Michigan Races Flip (R to D, N=5)**	123	11.4% (14)	63.4% (78)	13.8% (17)	11.4% (14)
Michigan Races Same (R to R, N=3)	85	9.4% (8)	78.8% (67)	11.8% (10)	0
Total Flip (R to D, N=8)***	192	14.1% (27)	62.5% (120)	14.1% (27)	9.4% (18)
Total Same (R to R, N=7)	147	10.9% (16)	78.2% (115)	10.2% (15)	0.7% (1)

*R=Republican, D=Democrat

**Excludes Epstein (R), who ran against another woman (Stevens, D) and was defeated.

***Whitmer is included in both Governor's Races and Michigan Races, but is only included once in the Total.

as part of the reason for her policy position: "On the floor of the state legislature, I shared my own story of surviving sexual assault to speak out for all the women they silenced by refusing to hold a single public hearing. As Ingham County Prosecutor, I implemented a new domestic violence unit, and am committed to bringing together university officials, law enforcement, students, and legislators to end sexual assaults on college campuses." Although we are not systematically analyzing images, Whitmer's notable website featured a photo of her at the Michigan capitol protesting Trump's inauguration in January 2017. Likewise, Dingell's website stated that "she is a recognized national advocate for women and children. ... She successfully *fought* to have women included in federally-funded health research, and advocated for greater awareness of issues directly related to women's health, including breast cancer and women's heart health." Like Dingell, Abrams also combined the nontraditional "fighter" language with women's issues, particularly abortion and birth control: "Stacey Abrams is a true *fighter* for women and families. ... As governor, Stacey will look out for women and defend our right to access basic healthcare, including contraception and abortion." These feminist self-presentations thus typically include policy statements and personal history.

Some self-presentations centered on an intersectional approach. For example, as the first openly gay Attorney General elected in the country, Dana Nessel illustrated both her personal interests and policy stance on LGBTQ rights. Nessel stated that she "lives in southeast Michigan with her wife, Alanna Maguire, their twin sons, Alex and Zach, along with various cats." Nessel's website also stated: "Dana is also recognized as one of the premier litigators of LGBTQ issues in Michigan." Her website mentioned her role in same-sex couples' custodial rights, second parent adoption, and employment discrimination.

Many of the candidates illustrated feminist self-presentations in their emphasis that they were the "first" woman or woman of color to hold their positions. For example, Lawrence stated that she "became the *first* female and first African-American Mayor of Southfield ... and was the *first* African-American female major party nominee for that position in Michigan's history" (emphasis ours). Tlaib stated: "Rashida made history in 2008 by winning her race for State Representative and becoming the *first* Muslim woman to ever serve in the Michigan Legislature" (emphasis ours). Likewise, Abrams said: "In 2010, Stacey became the *first* woman to lead either party in the Georgia General Assembly and the first African American to lead in the House of Representatives" (emphasis ours). Similarly, Mills' website stated: "For the past five years, Janet has served as the Attorney General of Maine—the *first* and *only* woman to hold the job" (emphasis ours). Thus, emphasizing the collective rights of women in their feminist self-presentations, candidates made links to the women's movement, feminist and intersectional issues, the #MeToo movement, and the historic nature of their candidacy.

Gender Self-Presentations and Election Outcomes

Considering self-presentations on websites in open and challenger races, we compared those seats that flipped from Republican to Democrat with those that stayed Republican in the 2018 election (See [Table 3](#)). Considering the gubernatorial races, we find that the four races that flipped the seats to Democrat (Grisham, Kelly, Mills and Whitmer) had a wider range of gender self-presentations than the four seats that remained Republican (Abrams, Jordan, Noem and Throne). Republican-staying seats were more likely to be gender neutral, at 77.4 percent (See [Table 3](#)), in contrast to the 59.8 percent of website self-presentations of the flipped seats. Conversely, flipped seats have more traditional (17.5 vs. 12.9 percent), nontraditional (15.5 vs. 8.1 percent), and feminist (7.2 vs. 1.6 percent) self-presentations. We see a similar pattern with the Michigan races. The five Democratic candidates (Whitmer,

Bensen, Nessel, Slotkin, and Stevens) who flipped their seats utilized a wider range of self-presentations than those who did not flip seats (Albro, Bizon and Driskell; See [Table 3](#)). In a context of bitter ideological divisions, these results are suggestive. In more conservative, Republican areas, women candidates appear to embrace gender neutral self-presentations, while those in progressive or mixed areas exhibit a wider range.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we move the scholarship on gender and politics forward by examining women's gender self-presentations in Twitter bios and websites in a key election year in U.S. politics. We extend our previous research on the spectrum of self-presentations by focusing on a broader range of races in the 2018 midterm U.S. elections. This area of research will be increasingly important in future elections as women continue to expand their role in politics and push the boundaries of typical self-presentations.

Races obviously take place within established political structures. As such, candidates must have widespread voter appeal. Successful candidates during the 2018 contests drew on a spectrum of self-presentations to strategically craft a complex and multifaceted image. All of the candidates examined here strategically blended together one or more types self-presentations. Gender traditional self-presentations included their status as caretakers and their roles as "listeners", which may attract conservative voters. Gender neutral self-presentations, the most common approach, de-emphasized gender and focused instead on accomplishments or policy positions. As a strategy, this approach may have the widest voter appeal, especially in conservative or ideologically mixed areas. Nontraditional self-presentations drew on stereotypically masculine language, traits, or occupations in new ways in 2018. Finally, feminist self-presentations emphasized a connection to women's movement issues and concerns, the #MeToo movement, and feminist intersectional approaches. The range of candidates' gender self-presentations were unprecedented and reflect a unique historical moment. In particular, feminist and non-traditional images and language contributed to a sense of women's power and agency. Women candidates ran for office in the midst of a "gender revolution" in which new self-presentations, most notably gender non-traditional and feminist, were put to the forefront of campaigns (Aronson and Fleming, 2023). Thus, the 2018 election illustrates the interplay between social movements, political power, and cultural change.

There are several limitations to this study that should be addressed by future research. First, we are limited in the number and type of races considered. Future research should expand the positions considered to develop a more systematic understanding of gender self-presentations in elections. In particular, it will be important to examine whether the broader use of these self-presentations influence election outcomes in a wider number of races. Although our small sample size allows us to provide an in-depth analysis of the self-presentations, it does not allow statistical comparisons of candidates who were successful with those who were not. A broader sample could help to disentangle the many factors at play (such as party affiliation, type of seat, and local dynamics) in determining the connection between gender self-presentation and election outcomes.

Although our examination has allowed us to consider some intersections between gender, ethnicity, race and sexual orientation, future research should deepen the comparison between different political parties, as well as statewide and local elections, as the constituencies, and therefore, self-presentations, may differ. It would also be interesting to compare the women candidates with their opponents, to discover how men candidates represent gender in their races. For example, the Governor of Georgia, Brian Kemp, may have pushed Abrams into more gender neutral approach in response to his hyper-masculine self-presentation. Finally, a historical and cross-cultural comparison with previous elections and elections in other contexts could help untangle the extent to which these self-presentations are unique to the midterm election in the U.S..

Despite these limitations, our study illustrates important dynamics that emerged in candidate presentation in the 2018 election. The gendered nature of politics today often becomes obscured in a context of extreme ideological and partisan polarization. However, gender self-presentations are an important component of campaigns, as new candidates and resistance after Republican successes are challenging norms for women candidates. These candidates are continuing to defy traditional expectations and starting to alter our expectations for how women in politics present themselves, in digital media and beyond.

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Exploring Women's Marathon Participation in the United States, 1980-2019

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ABSTRACT

Over 45 percent of participants in U.S. marathon events identify as women (World's Largest, n.d.), a noteworthy development considering women comprised just 11% of participants in 1980 (Ryder, 2013). Most U.S. women competing in marathon events also identify as white and middle class, indicating significant racial and socio-economic divisions in this growth in participation. The rise in U.S. women's marathoning is linked to historical changes in the late twentieth century, particularly the passage of Title IX, movements for social justice and women's liberation, and the commercialization and marketization of running events. How does the increase in women's participation relate to performance rates in organized marathon events? To better understand the historical and sociocultural factors associated with U.S. women's engagement in marathoning, this article examines the performance statistics and demographics of the top U.S. women marathon runners from 1980 to 2019 in three major marathon events in the country: New York City, Boston, and Chicago. Results demonstrate the age of high performing female marathon runners has increased significantly during the period, while race time has decreased significantly, and top performers have been largely white. These findings are discussed and contextualized with respect to historical and sociocultural factors surrounding the growth in U.S. women's marathon participation.

Keywords: women's marathon, sport history, performance, Title IX, race/ethnicity

INTRODUCTION

In the last fifty years, there have been important developments with regard to organized marathon events in the United States (U.S.). First, marathon events have increased in popularity due to event entrepreneurs, organizers, and researchers marketing running sports as an exercise in personal well-being and touting its potential range of health benefits, including cardiovascular fitness, muscle strengthening, and stress relief (Cooper, 1992; Miller, 2020). This expansion is part of a broader growth in the running industry, with an estimated annual worth of about \$1.4 billion and race companies sponsoring over 30,000 running events each year, from short sprints to ultramarathons (Lacke, 2018). In terms of marathons specifically, there over 1000 competitive races in the U.S. each year with a combined total of approximately 1.1 million runners (Galic, 2022).

Author Susan Lacke (2018) asserts that running in the U.S. today, including marathon running, has 'transformed into a full-on cultural movement spurred in large part by the rapid growth of women in the sport' (para. 3). This is evident in the growth in the number of women competing in marathon events, with over 45 percent of U.S. marathon participants identifying as women as of 2017 (World's Largest, n.d.). This is a notable development in U.S. women's sport history, considering just 11 percent of all marathon finishers in 1980 were women (Ryder, 2013). In terms of overall running participation in the country, the 26.2 Foundation reports that six out of every ten runners now identify as women (Demographics and Trends, n.d.). Today there are more women than men

participating in marathoning around the world for the first time and the U.S. has one of the largest percentages of women marathon runners compared to other nations (Andersen, 2021).

There are important social divisions within this growth in women's marathon participation in the U.S., notably related to racial identity. A recent Running USA survey found that white women comprise a majority of the U.S. women's marathon running population—African American women runners, by comparison, make up less than 10% (Petrzela, 2020). Indeed, African American women runners continue to be underrepresented in marathon running, despite statistics indicating that more Black Americans and Black women are running competitively and recreationally than in previous decades (Chenault, 2019). Further, there is little to no information on the participation of women who subscribe to other ethnicities, likely because participation rates are so low. For example, less than 5% of Hispanic women identify as runners (McShane and Armas, 2017). Within the past few years there have been a variety of running groups and initiatives created to support and promote inclusion within the running industry, such as the Running Industry Diversity Coalition, an organization that is also aiming to provide data on the racial and ethnic composition of running in the U.S. (Running Industry Diversity Coalition, n.d.).

In addition, there appears to have been a shift in athletic longevity, with an increase in the age of runners and faster performances among these older participants. As one recent example, a runner named Keira D'Amato, a 37-year-old mother of two, broke the U.S. women's record at the Chevron Houston Marathon (Meet 2022, 2022). D'Amato's victory in Houston is also remarkable as she took a seven-year hiatus due to an ankle injury, during which time she had two children. D'Amato's performance is indicative of a broader shift within women's sports, as other celebrated older female athletes perform at elite levels in organized international events. In the case of the Olympic Games, a few notable U.S. examples are Kerri Walsh-Jennings, a bronze medalist in beach volleyball at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games at 38 years old (Quigley, 2021); Dara Torres, a silver medalist in swimming at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games at 41 years old (Robb, 2010); and, Lindsey Jacobellis, a gold medalist in snowboard cross at the 2022 Beijing Olympics at 36 years old (Diaz, 2022). Though these women have been revered for their persistence and exceptional performances, they also signal a more widespread trend of women demonstrating high-level athleticism at older ages across all sports, including marathon running.

How does this significant growth of women's participation in organized, competitive marathon events relate to developments in the broader, ongoing 'revolution' in women's sports participation since the latter half of the twentieth century (Brake, 2010; Cahn, 1995)? If there are now dramatically more women participating in marathon events specifically, and sports in general, are we also seeing improvements in the performance times of elite participants? If there continue to be significant social divisions in the demographics of women marathon participants, particularly in terms of socioeconomic status and race, are these divisions also visible in terms of the top finishers at marathon events? If so, what do these things suggest regarding the possible links between historical context and performance in the case of women's marathoning? To engage with such questions, this article examines the performance and demographics of the top U.S. women marathon runners in major marathon competitions in the country from 1980 to 2019, the years that witnessed considerable growth in women's participation. Specifically, the performance and demographics associated with three important U.S. marathon events are analysed: the New York City (NYC) Marathon, the Boston Marathon, and the Chicago Marathon. The goal is to highlight and better understand possible connections between significant historical and sociocultural changes, processes and politics within broader U.S. society, the ongoing historic growth in women's participation in marathon running, and their performance in organized marathon events.

Results from our data indicate that the age and race time of high performing female marathon runners has improved significantly since 1980, with top performers in all three events almost wholly identifying as white. As such, we argue that improvements in U.S. women's marathon performances since 1980, intertwined with the racial and social divisions and inequalities apparent within this development, correlate with particular historical developments in the latter half of twentieth century, namely the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 (Brake, 2010), the so-called 'second wave' of feminist activism in the 1960s and 70s (Festle, 1996), and the boom in fitness and running consumerism in the 1970s and 80s (Sassatelli, 2010; Plymire, 2006). We suggest that the expansion of opportunities for women to participate in distance running since the inception of Title IX, which has predominantly benefitted white, middle-class women (Pickett et al., 2012), along with marketing efforts directed towards the white, middle-class female marathon runner, seem to have been key factors fuelling the changes in participation and performance statistics.

HISTORY OF WOMEN'S MARATHONING

The history of women's marathoning should be situated within the broader history of sport in the U.S., a gendered and racialized history in which groups of women have and continue to struggle to gain access and acceptance in sporting spaces originally designed to promote white masculine supremacy (Hargreaves, 1994; Cahn,

1995; Kimmel, 1996; Kidd, 2013; Schultz, 2014). Historians and sociologists have studied the ways in which women have participated in a social institution that, since at least the nineteenth century, has served as a ‘powerful cultural arena for the perpetuation of the ideology of male superiority and dominance’ (Messner, 1988: 199; Schultz, 2018). For African American women who wanted to participate in sports in the twentieth century, they also had to contend with issues of racism, racial stereotypes and discrimination that intersected with gender and social class. Race, historian Jennifer Lansbury (2014) notes, ‘always made a difference’ in differentiating their experiences from that of their white female counterparts (6). Despite achieving at the highest levels in a multitude of sports and becoming marketable, highly visible celebrities, women athletes from the twentieth century to the present continue to encounter gender and/or race-based forms of discrimination in the androcentric realm of sport. Such forms of discrimination include, but are not limited to: unequal pay (Alvarez, 2019); sexualisation in traditional and online media (Kane, 1996; Kavanaugh et al., 2019); exclusion from televised news and highlights shows (Cooky et al., 2021); the discriminatory practice of gender-verification testing in Olympic and international sport (Cooky and Dworkin, 2013; Pieper, 2016); restricted access to leadership positions (Kane and LaVoi, 2018; LaVoi, 2013); and the embedded sexism within sports and sporting organizations (Fink, 2016; Hindman and Walker, 2020).

Historians have documented how women have engaged in long distance running regardless of their access to organized marathon events throughout this gendered history (Jutel, 2003). Jaime Schultz (2015) writes that women have presumably been running ‘great distances’ long before the International Olympic Committee held its first officially sanctioned women’s marathon event in 1984, considering that ‘[e]ndurance running is a way of life in several cultures around the world’ (73). There are ‘sporadic’ accounts of women competing in various all-male marathon events since at least the turn of the twentieth century (Kuscik, 1977: 73), including two women who purportedly ran the marathon during the first modern Olympic event in 1896 (Tamini, 1993). Prior to the widespread acceptance of women as athletes later in the twentieth century, women were forced to look for discrete or unofficial ways to compete as ‘athletics’ officials persistently forbade women’s participation’ in official races (Schultz, 2015: 73). Restrictions on their participation were often based on longstanding medical myths and social stereotypes concerning the frailty of women’s bodies, along with fears that perceived masculine sports, such as running and track and field events, would damage a woman’s feminine beauty and reproductive system (McDonagh and Pappano, 2007). These myths and stereotypes would help limit women’s participation in long distance running events until the 1960s and 1970s, when organizations like the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) emerged to challenge restrictions and advocate for women’s opportunities at all levels of sport (Ware, 2011: 142).

The rise of the woman marathon runner coincided with the rising popularity of organized marathon in the latter half of the twentieth century. There was what one historian calls ‘an explosion of distance running events and in the number of people running or jogging’ (Chase, 2012: 245), with race events increasing exponentially from five in 1959 to about 200 in 1977. Major marathons like Boston and NYC went from having hundreds of starting runners to thousands and tens and thousands by 1980 (Cooper, 1992). As part of this shift in popularity, the number of women runners participating in events jumped from about twenty at the beginning of the 1960s, to over a hundred in the 1970s, to hundreds in the 1980s (Cooper, 1998: 158; Marathon, 1984; Schultz, 2015). Schultz (2015) claims that women were both ‘dismiss[ed] and dissuad[ed]’ (73) from participating in long distance running events until the 1960s, when ‘an incalculable number of women found in running emboldening and transformative experiences, many of which changed their relationships with others, with themselves and with their bodies’ (79). In terms of the marathon, this idea was illustrated through the prominent example of Kathrine Switzer, who, in 1967, became the first woman to compete in the Boston Marathon, using her first and middle initials to register for the event and evade officials (Switzer, 2017; Renick and Velez, 2013).

In 1970, women were formally permitted to compete in Amateur Athletic Union (AAU)-sanctioned marathon events, and by the end of the decade marathons transformed from ‘relatively non-commercialized, middle-class’ events restricted to men to contests with scores of women participants, demonstrating that the ‘marathon was no longer just for the elite athlete nor was it reserved only for men’ (Chase, 2012: 245; Cooper, 1992). The 1970s arguably ushered in a ‘competitive age’ in women’s long-distance running, as well as the white woman marathon runner as a cultural symbol of female empowerment (Switzer, 2017; Cooper, 1992). The 1970s also constituted a period in which marathon entrepreneurs increasingly shifted their focus to (white, middle-class) women as potential sporting consumers and participants in physically active pursuits such as aerobics and running (Andreasson and Johansson, 2014; Festle, 1996; Plymire, 2006).

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Anchored in the historical development of U.S. women’s athletic performance in major marathon events since 1980, a period which was at least partly shaped by historical developments in the preceding decades, this research is informed by scholarship on the social justice movement for women’s liberation and what historians have called

the 'second wave' of feminist activism of the 1960s and 70s (Stansell, 2010). This constituted a period of feminist activism that shed light on persistent and systemic gender inequalities in everyday life, including the traditionally male-dominated sphere of sport (Lee, 2007). Second-wave feminism, with its 'language of equality, opportunity, and rights' (Cahn, 1995: 249), influenced young women in the latter half of the twentieth century to openly and actively challenge longstanding notions of sports as male preserves and fuelled a new era of increased opportunity for women's sport (Schultz, 2014). Historians of women's sport, such as Susan Cahn (1995), argue that the second-wave feminist movement catalysed women's interest in sport throughout the U.S. In 1972, amidst the historic movement for women's liberation and second-wave feminism, the U.S. Congress also passed landmark legislation commonly known as Title IX, which stipulated that 'any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance' shall not discriminate or exclude any individual from participating or benefitting 'on the basis of sex' (Education Amendments Act of 1972, 2021). Historians of U.S. women's sport have underscored that Title IX, emerging during a period marked by feminist activism, 'renewed interest in women's sport nationwide' and helped usher in a 'dramatically new era' of women's sports that extends to the present (Schultz, 2014: 246). Today, scholars credit Title IX for serving as 'the catalyst for girls' and women's increased access to athletic participation opportunities' at schools and universities (Pickett et al., 2012: 1582).

The impact of the feminist movement on sport extended beyond Title IX. According to historian Mary Jo Festle (1996), women increasingly entered sporting spaces and challenged discrimination in sports 'everywhere they found it—in community programs like Little League Baseball; in high schools and universities; in clubs, road races, locker rooms and weight rooms' (107). The impact of the feminist movement on sport was perhaps most visibly symbolized in Billie Jean King's nationally televised defeat of Bobby Riggs in their 1973 'Battle of the Sexes' tennis match, dismantling myths of male superiority in sports and signifying 'the broader struggles for women's liberation and women's equality' (Cooky, 2017: 613). It was during this era of second-wave feminism that women and organizations actively confronted gender discrimination in marathon and long-distance running events, including the Road Runners Club of America's challenging of the AAU's ban on women competing in official events like marathons (Longman, 2011). Informed by this historical literature of sport during the movement of women's liberation and second-wave feminism, we approach the marathon event as what Messner (1988) calls a 'contested ideological terrain' in which women's athletic success represents a rebuke of the notion of male superiority in sports.

The article is also informed by scholarship on the racialized and classed aspects of the second wave of feminist activism in the 1960s and 70s, in order to better understand and contextualize prevailing racial and class inequalities within women's sport. Historians contend that the second-wave feminist movement exhibited the racial divisions of the era (Breines, 2006), and Black feminist activists encountered difficulty bringing Black feminist issues to the forefront of what was predominantly a white and middle-class feminist movement (Taylor, 2012). In response to their marginalization within the feminist movement, African American and Black lesbian feminist activists made the case, in what came to be called the *Combahee River Collective Statement*, for the 'development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking' (Combahee River Collective, 1977: para. 1; see also Taylor, 2012). Through this history of Black feminist activism, there has emerged a critical and scholarly tradition known by the term intersectionality, which focuses on the role of power, oppression, and privilege in the production of knowledge and recognizes that there are 'multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations' that shape the experiences of women (and women athletes) of color (McCall, 2005: 1771; see also Collins and Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989). This scholarship contributes to and complicates our approach to the study of women's marathon by helping us highlight the existence and persistence of other social inequalities within organized sport and their important intersections within the gendered experiences of women athletes.

Data Collection

The number of individuals, performance times, and demographics of the top 10 overall female finishers were collected using official race databases and race archives for the top three largest marathons in the U.S. (Chicago Marathon, NYC Marathon, and Boston Marathon) from 1980-2019. The races were selected due to being the largest and most renowned marathons in the U.S. with the greatest prize purse for the top 10 overall men and women (Abbott World Marathon Majors, n.d.). Among these, the finishers representing the U.S. were analysed. The U.S. female performers placing in the top 10 overall were selected for analysis, with a focus on top performance trends over the study period. Information about participant event time, age, and race/ethnicity was documented for the three event locations between the years 1995 and 2019. Age and race/ethnicity were determined from race databases and/or publicly available athlete profiles. From 1980 to 1995 only time and age information about participants in the NYC Marathon was available. Dates between 1995 and 2019 were compiled from all three race events with the exception of 2012 during which the NYC Marathon did not take place. For continuous variables (i.e., race time, age), an average was taken for the individuals placing in the top 10 in all three

race events. These were then averaged and depicted in five-year clusters (Figure 1 and Figure 2) to perform categorical analyses over the timeframe studied and provide further insight into the changes noted over time. In addition to the total number of top 10 U.S. finishers, the number of unique finishers (excluding repeat top 10 finishes within each five-year cluster) was recorded. Further, because data from 1980 to 1995 was only obtained for one marathon and only the top 10 finishers were recorded, the number of U.S. women finishing in these competitive places was almost always in single digits. This created substantial sample size discrepancies when comparing to later years. Hence, five-year clusters were used for end-point analyses. When reporting number of finishers, total percent of U.S. finishers in the top 10 was also reported to account for smaller sample sizes in 1980-1995. For categorical variables (race/ethnicity), frequencies were compiled from all three events and converted to percentage of all individuals from the U.S. placing in the top 10. The average percentage within each five-year cluster is depicted in Figure 3.

Statistical Analysis

Age and event time of U.S. runners were analysed using linear regression to evaluate the changes over the years for which data was available. Both variables were assessed for homogeneity of variance, linearity, and normality of residuals distribution and all assumptions were met. The analyses were run to include U.S. women who finished in the top 10 in each included race. When a significant or trending coefficient was identified, a one-way ANOVA (1×8) was performed to identify an effect for the cluster years on the dependent variable, either age or event time. A Tukey *post hoc* analysis was performed when a significant main effect was identified. For race/ethnicity, logistic regression was used to identify the odds of a white woman from the U.S. finishing in the top 10 compared to any other race/ethnicity. For this analysis, a data set including all top 10 finishers from the Boston, NYC, and Chicago Marathons from 1995-2019 was used, though only U.S. women were analysed. Data are presented as mean \pm SD. A significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was used, and $\alpha < 0.10$ was considered indicative of a trend.

RESULTS

Number of U.S. Finishers and Event Time

The number of U.S. finishers in the top 10 for each five-year cluster and unique finishers (excluding repeat top 10 finishes within each five-year cluster) are depicted in Table 1. Among U.S. top 10 finishers, event completion time has significantly decreased ($p < 0.001$) from 1980 to 2019 (Figure 1). For every year that passed, the average event time decreased by 0.13 minutes (7.8 seconds) ($\beta = -0.131$, $p < 0.001$) for top 10 finishers. One-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for cluster ($p = 0.003$) and *post hoc* testing revealed that the average event time in 1980-1984 (156.8 ± 4.7 min) was significantly longer than that recorded in 2010-2014 (151.3 ± 3.1 min, $p = 0.006$) and 2015-2019 (151.9 ± 6.5 min, $p = 0.009$). No other significant differences were noted between the five-year clusters.

Table 1. Number of top-10 finishers representing the United States in each five-year cluster depicted as total number and percent of all top-10 finishers

Year	Total [n (%)]	Total unique [n (%)]
1980-1984	22 (44)	20 (40)
1985-1989	8 (16)	8 (16)
1990-1994	7 (14)	7 (14)
1995-1999	20 (15)	13 (10)
2000-2004	21 (14)	18 (12)
2005-2009	30 (20)	18 (12)
2010-2014	31 (22)	24 (17)
2015-2019	48 (32)	34 (23)

Results from 1980-1995 include only the New York City (NYC) marathon. Results from 1995-2019 include NYC, Boston, and Chicago Marathons. Total percent of finishers accounts for smaller sample sizes in 1980-1995.

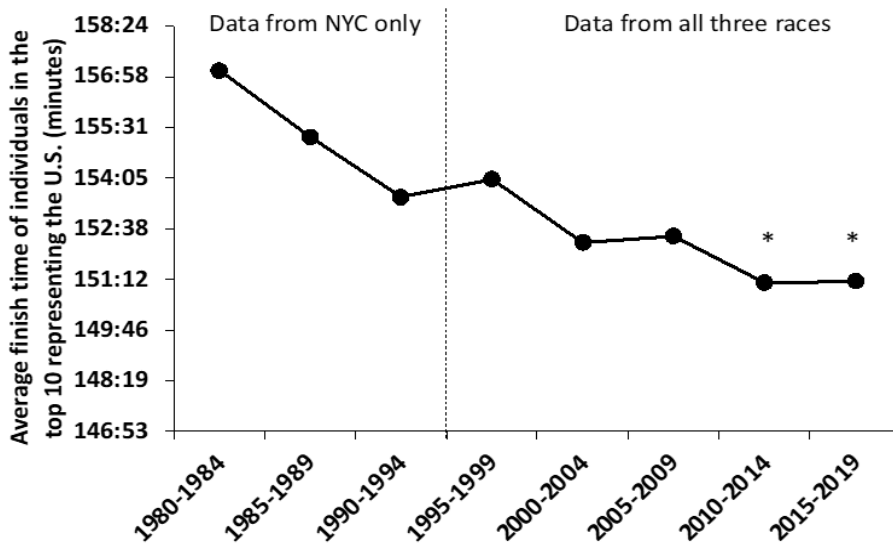


Figure 1. Average finish time (minutes) of Unites States women placing in the top-10 at the three major US marathons. Data are presented as averages of five-year clusters from 1980-2019. Results from 1980-1995 include only the New York City (NYC) marathon. Results from 1995-2019 include NYC, Boston, and Chicago Marathons (* indicates significantly different than the 1980-1984 cluster).

Age

Age increased significantly from 1980 to 2019 ($p = 0.018$) among top 10 finishers representing the U.S. (Figure 2). One-way ANOVA identified a significant effect for cluster ($p < 0.001$). *Post hoc* testing revealed that athletes in 1980-1984 (27.0 ± 4.2 years) were significantly younger than those competing in 1995-1999 (33.3 ± 4.2 years, $p < 0.001$), 2000-2004 (32.8 ± 5.3 years, $p < 0.001$), 2005-2009 (31.0 ± 5.4 years, $p = 0.022$), and 2015-2019 (30.9 ± 4.6 years, $p = 0.1$). A trend towards a difference was noted between mean age in 1980-1984 and in 2010-2014 (30.4 ± 4.2 years, $p = 0.089$). No difference in age was detected between 1980-1984 and 1985-1989 ($p = 0.88$) or 1990-1994 ($p = 0.44$) when only NYC race data was available. Additionally, no change in age was noted between any cluster from 1995-1999 and 2015-2019 ($p > 0.25$).

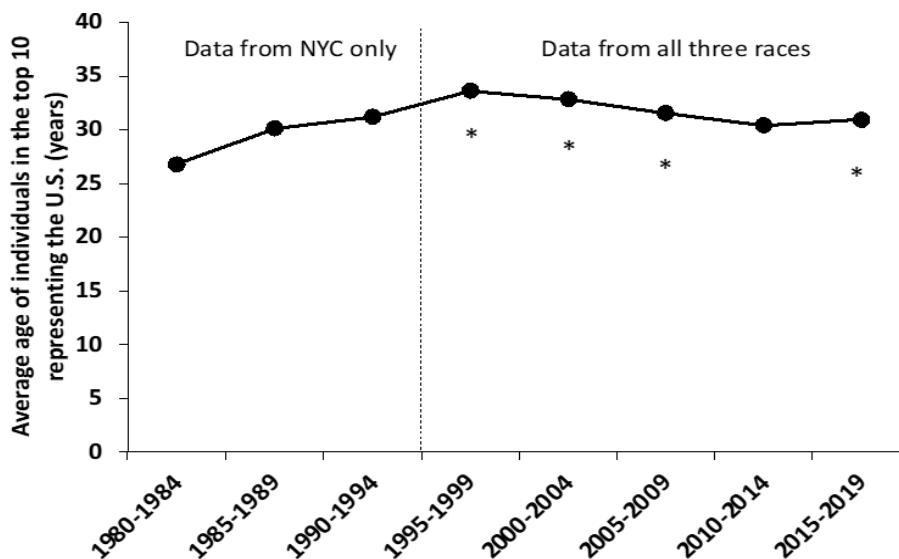


Figure 2. Average finish age (years) of Unites States women placing in the top-10 at the three major US marathons. Data are presented as averages of five-year clusters from 1980-2019. Results from 1980-1995 include only the New York City (NYC) marathon. Results from 1995-2019 include NYC, Boston, and Chicago Marathons (* indicates significantly different than the 1980-1984 cluster).

Race/Ethnicity

A total of 150 U.S. women placed in the top 10 in the three selected events from 1995-2019 and 134 of these women were white (Figure 3). The odds that a female representing the U.S. finished in the top 10 were 11.4 times higher for whites compared to all other races/ethnicities (Odds ratio = 11.35, 95% Confidence interval: [6.6,19.6]). Of the 150 women who finished in the top 10, only 16 women were of other ethnicities and 14 of these 16 finishers were U.S.-born citizens (13 Hispanic, 1 Native American), as opposed to recruits from other countries (1 Black, 1 Asian). Fewer than 2% of top 10 finishers representing the U.S. across all years studied were Black.

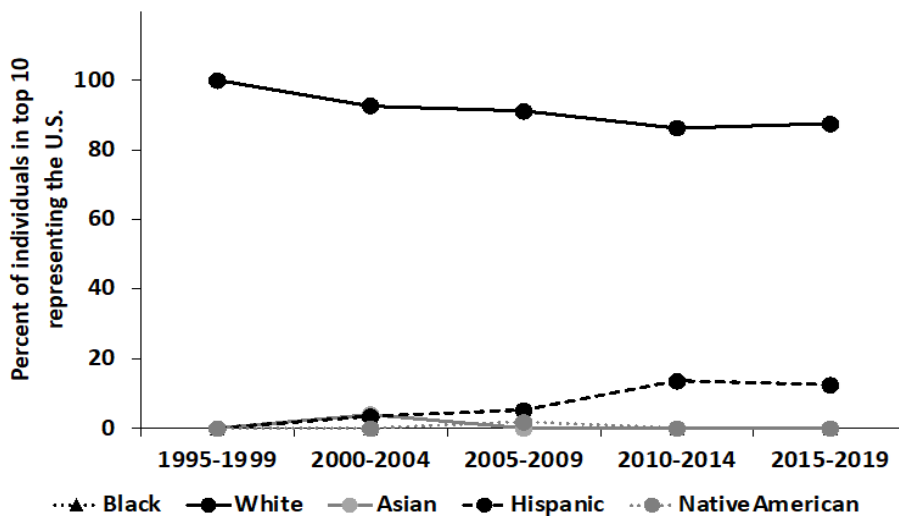


Figure 3. Racial/ethnic representation (percentage) of US women placing in the top-10 at the three major US marathons. Data are presented as averages of five-year clusters from 1995-2019 and include NYC, Boston, and Chicago Marathons. Data on race/ethnicity of athletes was not available prior to 1995.

DISCUSSION

Exploring the shifting historical and cultural context associated with the aforementioned dramatic growth in participation and improvement in elite women's marathon performance is paramount. As outlined in previous sections, the early 1970s marked an era wherein changing legislation and societal ideologies, along with significant interest and involvement, sanctioned and encouraged women's participation in competitive marathon events. The results from the four decades of women's marathon participation reviewed in this study suggest that the shifting norms regarding female athleticism and the marketization of the female marathon runner, in tandem with the inception of Title IX, not only offered essential opportunities to women and girls, but ultimately shaped changes in participation and elite performance in women's marathon. The results also demonstrate significant differences across the dimensions of event time, as well as age and race/ethnicity, each of which is anchored in important, contextual socio-cultural factors associated with rising participation rates in women's marathoning in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Event Time

In particular, the results presented herein demonstrate that the race time for the top 10 finishers has significantly decreased, by almost five minutes, during the time period covered in this research, although the data also suggest a plateau in time since 2010. According to Millard-Stafford et al. (2018), the event time performance gap between men and women is approximately 12.6% and has been holding stable since 1980, whereas in 1972 and 1976 it was 17.3% and 14.2% respectively, and consequently they argue that 'Title IX quickly and 'clearly narrowed the performance gap' (531). Indeed, world-wide marathon times in women have remained relatively stable since the mid-80s (Sparling et al., 1998; Senefeld, 2015). However, in line with our findings, Pate and O'Neill (2007) reported similar improvements in race time between 1976 and 2005, specifically among U.S. women. These statistics are further contextualized in relation to the exponential growth of marathon races allowing female participants in the 1970s (Schultz, 2015). Schultz (2015) asserts that marathon runners at this time 'challenged conventional gender norms by not only completing races, but also by doing so in increasingly faster times. Their athletic performances made important political statements about women's physical capabilities' (75). Eventually the women's marathon became a sanctioned race at the 1984 Olympics, cementing its status as a globally important, competitive event for women. Ultimately the 1970s marks a pivotal time period for women's marathon as the passage of Title IX

coincides with major race events finally allowing women to compete and thus can be credited with contributing to these corresponding decreases in women's marathon times.

Age and Socioeconomic Status

As the results demonstrate, the age of high performing female U.S. marathon runners increased significantly over the four decades studied. The average age of the women runners who finished in the top 10 in the last five-year time cluster reviewed is almost 31 years old, compared with 27 years old between 1980 and 1984. Since the marathon is not an NCAA sport, most competitive female runners enter events post-collegiately. Further, physiologically-speaking, declines in neuromuscular system functioning can begin to take place around 30 years of age (Hunter et al., 2016). While these declines are not as pronounced in athletes (Power et al., 2010), remaining competitive in the faster 5km and 10km distances can become more difficult which may result in more women transitioning to the marathon in their late 20s/early 30s to extend their competitive careers. Limitations in the number of marathon races physiologically tolerated in a year, as well as complex tactical strategies and experience racing a marathon distance, can take time to become accustomed to, potentially leading to women peaking at this specialty at later ages (Noble and Chapman, 2018).

In the first study to examine the age of marathon runners, Hunter et al. (2011) note that both the top male and female performers are typically in their late 20s. The increasing age of elite marathon athletes 'reflects motivation to train and remain competitive in sport' (Millard-Stafford et al., 2018: 533). In an analysis of the Berlin Marathon finishers, Nikolaidis et al. (2019) found that women's age at peak performance is 32. Further, findings from Elmenshawy et al.'s (2015) study on the ages of Olympic medalists in track and field, swimming, rowing, and speed skating echo the aforementioned marathon results, reporting that the peak performance age for women athletes has increased in the modern era.

As with event time, the results suggest that the impact of Title IX can be seen through the increase in age among U.S. women marathon finishers. The inception of Title IX in 1972 means that in the mid-to-late 1970s and 80s more young girls and women had the opportunity and encouragement to participate in organized sport at schools and at the collegiate level. Consequently, the late 1990s and 2000s featured more college-aged women wanting to continue their sport careers via intercollegiate athletics. It was during the time period studied that shifting socio-cultural dynamics, including the marketization of female athleticism by sporting and commercial organizations, undoubtedly spurred interest among women in continuing sporting and physically active pursuits beyond high school and/or college athletics. This includes opportunities for women to engage in long-distance running events outside of or after completing their academic pursuits. In other words, we are suggesting that there seems to be a mutually reinforcing relationship between the cultural phenomenon of women in the U.S. increasingly embracing the expanded opportunities to compete in organized sporting events well into adulthood, and the trend of increased average age of top finishers representing the U.S. in the major marathon events studied.

The impact of the expansion of sporting opportunities is both enmeshed with and has manifested through the increasing age of the runners. Historical accounts on the development of women's marathoning in the late twentieth century typically cite increased commercialisation and marketization of marathon as helping to galvanize the popularity of the sport and the longevity of women's participation. As early as the 1970s, entrepreneurs like NYC Marathon founder Fred Lebow began to market marathon events to the middle and upper-middle classes, particularly white recreational runners. Marathon event organizers 'consciously' tried to appeal to affluent, 'less serious' recreational runners to attract sponsorships and generate profits (Cooper, 1992: 248). This was part of an effort to not only attract sponsors and generate profit, but also to capitalize on women's burgeoning interest in recreational running. The events were increasingly promoted not so much as a competition for serious athletes, but as a fitness pursuit offering 'health-enhancing properties' for participants (246). Over the past four decades, the appeal of marathon (and other endurance pursuits, e.g., road and trail run events, triathlons, obstacle/challenge races) as a recreational and consumer pursuit, occurring in conjunction with changing social norms concerning women's athleticism, has resulted in a new women's recreational sport culture (Pauline, 2014).

Spurring the proliferation of marathon events, sports and fitness apparel corporations, such as Nike, have worked to increasingly incorporate the image of the athlete woman in their marketing and advertising campaigns to capitalize on the expanding demographic of potential female fitness and sporting consumers and profit from the rise of the woman runner as a feminist icon (Cahn, 1995). The dynamic transformation of women's fitness apparel since the 1970s and 80s can be illustrated through the advent of the sports bra, a popular consumer product that did not exist until the late 1970s and was initially just two jockstraps sewn together (Schultz, 2004). Today, corporate sports apparel makers dedicate a significant portion of the marketing and public relations energies to the female athletic market segment, evidenced through women-focused marketing efforts such as 'Nike Unlaced,' the corporation's four-pronged approach to customized women's sneakers (Teng, 2020). Aimed at bolstering revenue production and corporate profits, apparel companies continue to target the female athlete market segment with customized, technology-infused, gendered running gear. Lavrence and Lozanski (2014) argue that other popular

athletic apparel brands such as lululemon symbolize 'highly classed ideas of health' and personal responsibility (85), ultimately employing marketing strategies that 'fold discourses of empowerment into consumerism' to attract female customers and drive brand loyalty (78). The marketing messages of these corporations target women with consumer purchasing power, typically white and middle-class women, who the corporations believe are desiring popular athletic apparel, to embody trends and a brand ethos, as well as to train. These brands have engineered sportswear tailored to women's bodies designed to provide style and function, such as sports bras, running skirts, tank tops, shoes and more (Pauline, 2014). Further, companies are turning their efforts to younger consumers in order to harness brand loyalty at an early age. With a greater directed emphasis on corporate marketing attention follows more participants and increased competition, subsequently promoting longevity in participating in the sport and, we argue, contributing to the increased age of women participants in organized recreational sporting events such as marathons.

Today, not only are the majority of women running marathon races in their 30s and 40s, with women typically outnumbering men in co-ed races (Bachman, 2016), but there has also been what Pauline (2014) terms 'a surge in women-only events that have been embraced by the public' (4). A few notable examples are the Disney Princess or Tinker Bell Half Marathon events, which are now some of the largest marathon races in the U.S. and are commercial, corporate-sponsored events typically focused around 'fun, camaraderie, and family' (Miller, 2014: 4). There are also obstacle races, such as Mudderella or the Dirty Girl, which have also taken off in recent years and focus on female empowerment (Pauline, 2014: para 3). According to one *Runner's World* journalist, such women-only races 'started as a way to show the world that women could run long distances, and to give women a place to prove to themselves that they could run' (Miller, 2014: para. 3). Many of these gender-specific race events, targeting specifically female consumers and promoting a supposed ethos of inclusivity, often advertise incentives such as an opportunity for a weekend getaway, other forms of pampering, a connected community through social media, and expert advice and information (e.g., nutrition, dieting, training regimens) (Miller, 2014; Pauline, 2014). These marketed events are presumably contributing to the increase in women's participation of virtually all ages and abilities.

However, there also remains an important class distinction within this trend as a prerequisite of participation is typically a socioeconomic status in which one must have the available time to train and attend an event, as well as the financial resources, transportation, and potentially childcare. Further, there exists an undeniable relationship between social class and race/ethnicity, particularly with distance running. For instance, the five top running cities and towns across the U.S. are largely white and remain segregated with respect to running communities (Benton, 2021). Moreover, racial segregation, education level, and running participation are highly correlated (Bridges, 2019). Non-white participants cite safety concerns associated with training, including hate crimes, time, and family obligations as barriers to endurance running participation (Benton, 2021). Historical linkages between race and class have created spatial inequality wherein more Black Americans and people of color are living in poverty and/or poorer neighbourhoods than white Americans. Thus, environmental geographies restrict access to physical spaces to run and train, and further, differing occupational and custodial care commitments limit women's ability to be physically active, let alone have time to train for an endurance event. These considerations underscore how contemporary marathon races often serve as competitions for more affluent, privileged, white women.

Race/Ethnicity

Illustrated within the discussion of age and socioeconomic status, white, middle-class females represent the majority of marathon event participants. Simultaneously (and potentially inadvertently), Title IX has also contributed to the relative absence of women of color competing in the major marathon events in the country. The final dimension of this article's analysis considered the race/ethnicity of the U.S. women top 10 finishers since 1980. Results demonstrated that runners placing in the top 10 were almost wholly white women. Specifically, 89.3% (134/150) of female top 10 finishers were white, while 8.6% (13/150) were Hispanic. The other approximately two percent identified as Native American or women originating from outside of the U.S. These findings are not surprising, but they reveal important areas for opportunity and participation-related improvements in women's marathon and highlight glaring gaps in Title IX legislation that have yet to be adequately addressed. While marathon generally occurs outside of institutions receiving federal funding and therefore does not have to conform to Title IX legislation, K-12 schools and universities are the primary feeder system for Olympic and professional sport athletes, and therefore those women that receive the opportunity to compete in sports at a young age are more likely to continue their participation (Bergland, 2015).

Title IX, as applied to sports, has focused on gender rather than race, and therefore white women have benefited far more than their Black counterparts (Rhoden, 2012; Theune, 2019). As we have discussed previously in this article, although Title IX has had a significant impact on women's sports in the U.S., women are still disadvantaged when compared to men. In the case of women athletes of color, this inequality is compounded in that they face both gender and race-based discrimination, a 'double jeopardy' associated with their participation opportunities

(Pickett et al., 2012: 1582; see also Theune, 2019). Accordingly, Theune (2019) argues that intersectionality is an important consideration as it ‘can be used to examine how racial and sex inequalities converge to limit access to sports participation opportunities for Black women and girls’ (2). Designed as a ‘single-axis’ piece of legislation, Title IX focused primarily on the issue of gender equality, which, as Mathewson (2012) notes, was ‘premised on the notion that interest in athletic ability were equally distributed between genders’ (296). As a result, the sporting opportunities created after Title IX have disproportionately benefitted white, particularly middle-class, female athletes (Evans, 1998). African American women, women of color, and working-class women receive disproportionately fewer benefits in relation to Title IX than their white, middle-class counterparts (Theune, 2019). In particular, ‘girls of colour, girls of lower socioeconomic status, and girls in urban and rural areas often enter sports later, participate in lower numbers, and drop out earlier than white girls, suburban girls, and girls from higher socioeconomic status’ (Staurowsky et al., 2020: 16).

Such racial inequalities are evident in the participation rates of white and African American women athletes following Title IX. Pickett et al. (2012) found that over a 30-year period (1972–2002), the levels of sports participation for white girls increased from 30.6% to 39.9%. Meanwhile, during the same period, the levels of sports participation for Black girls decreased from 34.7% to 27%. Further, white girls are more likely to participate in privatized sport opportunities which is in opposition to their non-white counterparts who are more likely to participate in school-based programs (cited in Staurowsky et al., 2020). In addition, Black girls do not have the same range of sports offerings in high school as white women do, often because they are enrolled in schools that are not resource-rich and are populated with lower income students (Pickett et al., 2009, 2012; Staurowsky et al., 2020; Theune, 2019). Coupled with this is the fact that ‘schools attended by African American females tend not to offer the “growth sports” leading to college athletic scholarships—for example, soccer, volleyball, crew, softball, and the like—in similar proportions to those available in schools with large concentrations of white females’ (Pickett et al., 2012: 1594). Scholarships in these sports often attract white, middle-class female athletes, causing female athletes of color to be directed to a particular, narrow set of sports, predominantly basketball and track and field (Pickett et al., 2012; Theune, 2019). As this study has demonstrated, despite the direction into high school and collegiate track and field, African American women are still historically absent from the top marathon finishers. The confluence of structural factors adversely impacting participation opportunities for working-class athletes and women athletes of color is arguably contributing to, or at the very least shaping, their exclusion from recreational, post-collegiate and consumer-driven sporting opportunities such as marathon events (Hextrum and Sethi, 2021; Pickett et al., 2012; Theune, 2019).

Accordingly, critics assert that Title IX can be conceptualized as ‘both problematic and advantageous—[it created] segregated opportunities for women based on their presumed athletic inferiority, which, ironically, also facilitated their access to athletic opportunities,’ particularly if they were white and middle class (Theune, 2019: 4; see also Hextrum and Sethi, 2021). Hextrum and Sethi (2021) argue that Title IX reifies ‘gender discrimination from a white, middle-class vantage,’ cementing ‘race and class inequities’ (3). This is largely due to the perception that Title IX has *reinforced* the segregation of sports and ignores existing racial and class inequalities (Brake, 2010). Rhoden (2012) refers to race as a ‘debilitating limitation of Title IX’ that is rarely discussed. Accordingly, this article presents results that seem to underscore the subtle, yet systematic impact that Title IX has had on both white women and women of color in marathon running. Moreover, our findings add credence to Theune’s (2019) assertion that ‘sports functions as a hierarchy distributing disproportionate sporting opportunities to privileged groups...while keeping disadvantaged groups, particularly Black women and girls, “in their place,” limited to separate and unequal chances to play’ (7).

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This article has presented important results that outline performance and demographic changes within elite U.S. women’s marathoning with respect to age, event time, socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity. Specifically, we have argued that not only have organized, commercial marathon events in the U.S. grown in popularity, there have also been improvements in performance among elite women runners, evidenced by the demographics of top finishers. There appears to be important parallels between the demographics and social divisions within these performance statistics and the historical developments that arguably fuelled women’s participation in events such as marathons, including Title IX, the commodification and marketization of the woman runner as a feminist icon, as well as important socio-cultural, contextual shifts related to the women’s sport economy more broadly. Collectively, these developments have led to greater opportunity, especially for white women, which is reflected in improvements in top performance times. Certainly, women’s sports and women athletes deeply benefited from the opportunities they were afforded 50 years ago with the passage of the Congressional legislation in 1972. However, as Staurowsky et al. (2020) explain, ‘women athletes and women sport leaders are still confronted with challenges that impede their full and fair access to play, compete, and work; that contribute to work and play

environments that are unwelcoming; and that leave girls and women too often chasing equity' (34). Hextrum and Sethi (2021) also caution that '[u]ncritically celebrating Title IX disguises persistent gender inequities in sport' (2). Thus, it is paramount that the next 50 years of Title IX legislation build on the first 50 years and strive to even the playing field by facilitating more sporting opportunities for underserved girls and women given the imbalances that exist related to participation and performance.

There were limitations with respect to the research and results presented herein that should be noted. First, men's marathon performance in these races over this period of time was not concomitantly analysed. Understanding men's performance associated with age, event time, and race/ethnicity as a basis of comparison would provide some interesting results that might further contextualize our findings. Second, data on race and ethnicity was not available through public records prior to 1995, nor were official event results for the Boston or Chicago Marathons. Thus, trends reported prior to 1995 reflect only NYC Marathon results. Similarly, data prior to 1980 was not available through public records and future analyses should extend examinations of trends prior to the passage of Title IX. We opted to analyse results from the three U.S. marathons with the greatest overall participation rates, however including additional races could add important context (Running USA, 2017). Further, as is common in elite runners, several women repeated top 10 finishes over multiple years, however our data still present success in U.S. women marathon runners over four decades. Finally, we have chosen to focus on U.S. top performers, which inherently limited sample size in some of the five-year clusters. Future studies should include other popular U.S. marathons and international events as well as a comparison with non-U.S. performers and performances beyond the top 10. Specifically, analyses of Black women's performance trends from non-U.S. countries are of particular interest for future inquiry.

Future research should also consider international top 10 finishers in these races and any contextual factors in other countries potentially impacting the rise of the female marathoner, particularly given that women's marathon has only been an Olympic event since 1984. Further, understanding more about how international recruitment and flexible citizenship impact women's opportunities in this sport would provide perspective regarding global opportunity, national soft power strategies, and the business of women's marathon. In addition, inquiry into other factors influencing performance and participation is paramount. For example, understanding the impact of environmental conditions, technology or gear, and equipment development would add context to event times. Moreover, approaching future research from a diversity, equity, and inclusion perspective could lead to important questions regarding how women find their way into marathon, at what age, and with what athletic background, and offer crucial insight into how the sport can provide more opportunity for girls and women. Specifically, organizations like Black Girls Run and Girls on the Run are now widespread, offering young girls more ways to learn the sport of running (Miller, 2014). In addition, in recent decades there have been increased opportunities for individuals with disabilities to participate in running events at all levels, for instance, some marathon events have wheelchair divisions. The exploration of the intersection of disability, gender, and race/ethnicity in running is an understudied area of inquiry that is important to investigate as increased opportunities may spur future demographic change in marathon and other running sports. Generational change is also an important consideration as millennials are not participating in marathon in the same numbers as older women which may alter the future of the sport in myriad ways (Bachman, 2016). Understanding how women of different ages understand and interpret opportunity and female athleticism is an area worthy of future investigation. Lastly, consideration of related running events, such as ultramarathoning, should be studied to see if the same trends are present and/or how to ameliorate and diversify participation opportunities.

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Sounds from the Balconies: Aural Resistance against Covid-19 Pandemic in Italy and India

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to make a comparative study between the balcony performances, which primarily involved the production of sounds (both musical and non-musical), held during the onset of the Covid pandemic in Italy and India to boost public morale and influence community solidarity. This article examines how Indians and Italians generated aural resistance against the pandemic through this novel method of sonic production to cancel the silence of death with the sounds of life, and how a community feeling and a sense of unity were injected through the sounds. This article juxtaposes the Italian and the Indian experiences of musical resistance against the pandemic, revealing similar patterns of response existing between them, by highlighting the multifaceted sides of the balcony performances that celebrated life over death and destruction, which ideationally and phenomenologically connected the two countries separated by geographical distances. Besides, it also discusses the impact and aftermath of the aforementioned performances to highlight different social, cultural, and political modalities generated by them.

Keywords: balcony, community, Covid-19, music, pandemic, resistance

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic reigned supreme over the planet for nearly two years; starting toward the final lap of the year 2019, it claimed the lives and livelihoods of millions around the world. As scientists desperately searched for a vaccine to check the proliferation of the disease that erupted in China and spread like wildfire around the globe, the entire world went into the largest lockdown ever witnessed in the history of humanity, thanks to the highly contagious nature of the disease. While the medical community, emergency workers, and government officials tried to shield citizens from the onslaught of the pandemic, cultural resistance also kicked in to develop a psychological barrier against it. Sounds, especially music, occasionally emerged as a cultural shield to cultivate and bolster community sentiment and mental resistance in Italy and India, the two countries separated by geographical distance, yet glued together by a disastrous fortune punctuated by the pandemic. In Italy, one of the worst affected countries during the pandemic, people gathered on the balconies in the form of a flashmob and sang their hearts out in order to boost morale during nationwide lockdown. In places like Rome, Naples, and Sicily, citizens gathered on the balconies to interact with each-other through classic folk and patriotic songs like 'Abbracciamme' ('Hug Me'), 'Canto della Verbena' ('And While Sirena Sleeps'), 'Bella Ciao' ('Goodbye Beautiful'), which tethered people in a single cultural bond and inspired them to develop community solidarity and a psychological firewall against death and disease, and this spirit of not bowing down before the pandemic was encapsulated by the slogan of assurance- *Andrà tutto bene*— everything will be all right. Similarly, in India, people came out on the balconies to sing and clap, ring bells, and cling metal vessels to cheer the emergency workers combating the pandemic. Following the request

made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, people gathered to blow conch shells, sing patriotic songs, and even organized balcony concerts to pave way for a community to bond over music and boost morale. This paper would examine how Italians and Indians generated an aural resistance against the pandemic through this novel method of sonic production to cancel the silence of death with the sounds of life; how a community feeling and a sense of unity was injected through the songs; and how this aural enterprise was lambasted from several fronts, especially in India, as critics alleged that this exercise was actually an attempt to subvert the horrifying reality of the pandemic and it was an endeavor to airbrush the governmental failure in tackling it. This article juxtaposes the Italian and the Indian experiences of aural resistance against the pandemic, to reveal similar patterns of responses existing between them, by highlighting the multifaceted sides of the balcony performances that celebrated life over death and destruction. The two aforementioned countries have been selected as case studies primarily for the purpose of contradistinction, given their disparate experiences of the same phenomenon. This article, through the comparative study between Italian and Indian experiences, highlights the common cultural and performative underpinnings existing between the balcony performances in a European and an Asian nation, despite the geographical and cultural distances separating them.

SETTING THE SCENE: ITALIAN AND INDIAN EXPERIENCES OF BALCONY PERFORMANCES

The accelerated expansion of the empire of Covid-19, spearheaded by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), debilitated society and the economy almost of the entire world, and Italy emerged as one of the worst affected countries in the European theatre of the pandemic. As of 27 March 2020, nearly one hundred and ninety-nine countries and territories had fallen prey to the pandemic, and as of the same date, Italy represented the third country in the world in total number of cases, and topped the global list in the total number of deaths (Ortenzi et al., 2020). Italy reported two cases of Covid-19 toward the end of January 2020, and by February, the pandemic had spread like wildfire across the country, which ranked as “the third country worldwide in terms of total number of cases, after the USA and China, despite its markedly smaller population size. The Northern part of Italy was the most affected part of the country with Lombardia, Emilia-Romagna and Veneto regions had the highest number (and proportion) of cases” (Ortenzi et al., 2020: 1-2). The pandemic soon started to make inroads to the less developed southern portion of the country, and under the direction of Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, the already imposed quarantine on regions like Lombardy and northern provinces was expanded to encompass the entire country, placing more than sixteen million people under complete lockdown, curtailing public mobility and shutting down non-essential sectors (Lowen, 2020). The pandemic years witnessed a plunge in the Italian economy and a significant number of casualties; to date, Italy has recorded a total 25,488,166 coronavirus cases, with 187,272 deaths, and 25,072,909 recoveries (Worldometer, n.d.).

With the entire country coming to a halt and people confining themselves inside their houses to halt the rapid spread of this highly contagious disease, Italians gathered on the balconies of their houses, singing amidst the nationwide lockdown to boost the morale of the community. Videos of citizens across cities like Rome, Siena, and Naples coming out on their balconies, singing and playing instruments along with occasional twists of dance went viral on social media, and music eventually emerged as a tool to invoke community sentiment and solidarity against the social distancing norms that were alienating and incarcerating people inside their apartments and minimizing interpersonal interactions. Spontaneously described as a ‘flashmob,’ this initiative “was launched on Facebook by Stefania Cammarata di Mango, a singing teacher from Turin, on the 13th of March 2020. From that day, every afternoon at noon people on their balconies/rooftops/windows across the country met to applaud the Italian doctors, nurses, and workers serving on the frontline, and every evening at 18:00 to sing songs together” (Ruiu and Ragnedda, 2022: 8). As the country reeled under the burden of the pandemic, the residents began “impromptu singalongs, flashmobs, musical performances, even dancing, from their windows” (Devane, 2020). The unifying signifier, which connected the multitudinous performances spanning across diverse musical genres like patriotic songs, folk music, and popular music, seems to have been the Italian slogan of reassurance – *Andrà tutto bene* (‘Everything will be alright’); it served as an antidote to the gripping fear of death.

The Italian experiences were replicated in an indigenous form in India, when Indians gathered on their balconies to sing, cling vessels, and blow conch shells to declare solidarity with the emergency workers like doctors and paramedics, and boost public morale, that started with ‘Janata Curfew,’ or the periodic/intermittent cessation of activities across the country to keep the proliferation of the pandemic at bay. The first cases of Covid-19 in India were identified in three towns of Kerala, among three Indian medical students who had returned from China (Narasimhan, 2020). Lockdowns were announced by 25 March 2020, with infection rates rising across the country; with 90,000 cases reported at the peak in mid-September, it slowly nosedived (Safi, 2021), although a much sinister second wave would strike India in the next year. However, the aforementioned performances continued throughout the pandemic, amplifying both musical and non-musical sounds, ranging from Bollywood pop music

to clanging of utensils, from balcony parties and concerts featuring classical, retro, and remixed songs to banging of pots and pans, creating a unique texture of variegated sounds. Just as happened in Italy, Indians, initially instigated by the government, started producing sounds from the balcony spaces in order to overcome the inexorable clause of social distancing and alienation that had been bestowed on them.

CONSTRUCTING AURAL COMMUNITIES

The balconies across Italy and India became united through performances and shared experiences of pandemic, despite being separated by geographical distances, to form a community of variegated sounds. The pandemic introduced the protocols of social distancing and alienation, especially in populated urban spaces, that led to a near breakdown of people-to-people contact, wherein the practice of balcony singing reinforced the ideas of a community through the creation of a musical nexus among the residents. Modernity and globalization have underscored the dominance of individualism in the public sphere; the individual has become the central unit of social life, where community relationships and wider social relations have largely taken a backseat, becoming “dissolved in the acid bath of competition” (Beck, 1992: 94). The modern world has witnessed a shift in the traditional modes of interpreting communities: from understanding them in terms of factors like family, neighborhoods, and friends, communities are currently interpreted as a set of practices, involving various forms of social relations, as Blokland describes, from “fluid encounters to durable engagements” in communities (2017: 15). This section will try to understand how musical sounds emerged as a medium which facilitated everyday interactions during the pandemic, when individualism was translated into a state of forced seclusion, and intercommunity interactions were reestablished through the balcony performances, alongside and through social media.

Sound is a significant element for assigning symbolic and cultural meanings to spaces; it may reinforce the “sense of community or be interpreted as unwanted and isolating. For example, quietness, or the lack of sound, could be either interpreted as reassuring and pleasant by some residents, or threatening and unsettling by others” (Lewis, 2020: 107). While the available literatures on urban spaces depict how cities have become noisier over the time, thereby triggering anxiety in the residents, an absolute quietness and lack of sound (which reigned supreme during the pandemic) could be appalling, as evident in Camilla Lewis’ study of the aural dimensions of neighboring at the Claremont Court housing scheme in England, which involved Robert, a test subject of Lewis: “The lack of noise signalled that there were no neighbours around to help him [Robert] should a problem arise, which further exacerbated his sense of isolation” and subsequently reinforced his “concern about the demise of community and lack of neighbourly relations in his stairwell” (2020:102). The balcony performances were an indispensable tool to cancel out the monumental anxiety generated by the pandemic, which defamiliarized the bustling soundscape of the urban spaces by introducing a state of perpetual silence; while physical interactions were limited, the interpersonal relationships were mediated by sounds, both musical and non-musical, leading to a creation of an aural community of performers and audiences.

Sound is a pivotal element of embodied experience, “which should be analysed in order to understand how community is constituted in relation to the physical and social environment” (Lewis, 2020: 106). Production of musical sounds by the community during the pandemic was not an unusual occurrence, since music-making is arguably a universal human trait; the prehistoric fossils, dating back to 530,000 years, reveal that the early humans had “the horseshoe-shaped hyoid bone in the throat in a similar position to modern humans, they would have had the physical ability to sing” (Prasad, 2018). The early humans may have produced rhythmic music by clapping their hands or by striking one stone against the other, and this practice later might have given birth to musical instruments. The primary function of music has been bringing people together, as Jeremy Montagu from University of Oxford explained, “Music leads to bonding, such as bonding between mother and child or bonding between groups...Music keeps workers happy when doing repetitive and otherwise boring work, and helps everyone to move together, increasing the force of their work. Dancing or singing together before a hunt or warfare binds participants into a cohesive group” (2017: 4). Musical sounds, therefore, have remained etched to the collective unconscious of the community since time immemorial, and the production of music and non-musical sounds from the balconies tapped that unconscious reservoir of embodied experience of sounds, that instigated people to move out of their isolated state and interact with the rest of the community through sounds, thereby reinforcing the primitive function of music: community building and dissemination of messages and emotions.

Two instances could be given to illustrate how sounds have contributed toward bolstering community feelings in Italy and India. In Turin, Italy, a woman who could not meet her neighbor, involved her in a singing performance, by shouting “Ciao Vittoria, I love you.” (Frida, 2020). When the performer was interviewed, she mentioned that she and her partner started to do the shopping for their older neighbor and to have a daily relationship with her through social media. In exchange, the neighbor supported them with her expertise in cooking traditional food from the South of Italy (where her family is originally from), strengthening their relationship”

(Ruiu and Ragnedda, 2022). Similarly, in India, the balcony sounds paved way for community reconsolidation and injected a sense of togetherness, as Kshitij Narain, a resident of Noida, described the balcony performances following the 'Janata Curfew' as uplifting:

“It felt like a collective resolve to fight a common threat. Though we are all locked inside our homes and isolated from the rest of the world, we are together in facing this crisis. We all owe it to the brave people who are working day in and day out, beyond the call of duty, risking their lives to keep us safe. They need all the encouragement and support, and should know that each one of us is there for them and grateful for everything, for saving our lives.” (Srivastava, 2020).

The balcony performances were characterized by the convergence of a number of musical genres, ranging from classical to folk music, leading to the creation of heterogeneous aural textures in the cities. Different sonic idioms (not limited to songs and melodies, but also incorporating apparently 'non-musical sounds' like clapping, banging, whistling, etc.) contributed to the generation of a common sonic field, connecting different performers from different sectors of a city. While their performative and aesthetic dimensions varied, they were linked together in a aural-symbolic network espousing community solidarity and togetherness, that likely effaced the hierarchy between the so-called highbrow and the other forms of music, thereby creating a decentralized and dehierarchized sonic structure. In Italy, a plethora of songs emanated from the balconies, such as 'Volare' (a folk song), 'Nessun Dorma' (aria from Giacomo Puccini's opera *Turandot*), 'Canto della Verbana' (traditional song from Sienna, Italy), 'Abbracciamme' (a pop song by the Italian singer Andrea Sannino), to create a perfect blending of diverse genres (Thorpe, 2020). The Indian scenario has not been entirely different, as scores from Bollywood films, recitals of celebrated compositions by western classical musicians, songs by the Indian musical groups, along with applause, ringing of bells, clanging vessels, etc., led to the creation of diverse 'sound patches' across the cities, involving both musical and non-musical sounds, where the latter was absorbed into the rubric of the former in the process of generation of sounds. Though the balcony performances can be described as concerts (the following section of this article further elucidates this idea), a concert is characterized by a performative 'center,' a conductor, lead singer, or a preconceived blue-print of orchestration, that controls and modulates different nodes of performances. But these balcony performances were characterized by the loss of any center, that could organize these diverse sounds emanating from different sections of a city into a harmonious whole, where these individual performances could be clustered together to imagine a pan-city concert against the pandemic terrors. In the absence of a center or an organizing principle, the different sounds should have existed in a state of freeplay. However, this freeplay state, in reality, would be synonymous with chaos, and it would mirror the anarchic state of the globe grappling with the pandemic; the music generated in this context could become a register of meaninglessness and nothingness, rather than emerging as a medium for disseminating positivity and solidarity. Hence, the pandemic could be interpreted as the center that propelled the creation of these diverse sounds, that helped to “orient, balance, and organize the [sonic] structure...but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we may call the freeplay of the structure” (Derrida, 2010: 278).

Although the balcony performances targeted the notion of the carnivalesque and aimed to uplift the spirit and morale of the people, it also aimed at promoting reverence for the social distancing protocols imposed by the government. The balcony spaces, therefore, signified a tension between the desire for a creative and spiritual flight from the stifling condition of the pandemic, and the necessity to comply with the restrictions to ensure self-preservation and security against a highly contagious disease. The balconies during the pandemic largely functioned as liminal spaces, and “their daily arbitrations of both joy and conflict are what knit solitary lives into neighbourhoods” (Krishnamurthy, 2021). The formation of an aural community, connecting citizens from different sections of a locality through sounds, had only been possible because of the presence of the balconies, which performed the “constitutive function of in-between spaces for such community formation” (Krishnamurthy, 2021). During the pandemic, balcony performances emerged as a daily ritual, creating a mechanical solidarity that facilitated “group identification and identity fusion” (Whitehouse and Lanman, 2014: 674). Besides, it also promoted organic solidarity, “that keeps basic functions of society at work. This is exemplified by the substitution of cultural events with balcony performances by celebrities, which keep cultural and artistic functions of society active in exchange for an audience” (Ruiu and Ragnedda, 2022: 9). As a result, this mode of solidarity “provided the opportunity for individual creativity to emerge and functional use of the media to activate social solidarity, oriented to keep society functioning” (Ruiu and Ragnedda, 2022: 9), thereby effacing the boundary separating mechanical and organic solidarity during the time of the pandemic.

BALCONIES AS CONCERT STAGES

The two years of the pandemic transformed the functional nature of the balconies in Italy and India; from an exterior, protruding space that acts as a hyphen between the intimate space of the 'personal' and the public 'outer' space, balconies emerged as concert stages, where musicians gathered to produce tunes to uplift mass morale. While concert stages are specialized arenas that facilitate the dissemination of music from the performer to the audience, a degree of alienation operates, which distances the audience from the performer, and bestows a magical aura on the latter, who appears to have been occupying a distinct space which remains outside the ambit of the spectators, yet intersects with it. The performer becomes a formidable object who generates awe and veneration from an exotic pedestal punctuated with lights and props, as "[t]he classic props of the music-hall, which are invariably rounded up here, constantly make the unveiled body [of the performer] more remote, and force it back into the all-pervading ease of a well-known rite...the whole spectrum of adornment, constantly makes the living body return to the category of luxurious objects which surround men with a magical decor" (Barthes, 1994: 85). The balcony performances have, however, inverted this practice; the element of alienation and magicity have substituted with proximity and familiarity, where the spectators could easily connect with the performer both socially and spiritually. In Italy, with the closure of prominent concert halls like La Scala and La Fenice, balconies emerged as concert stages, witnessing an intersection of both professional/trained and amateur musicians utilizing their balconies to generate music. These performances were not judged by the yardstick of excellence or musical competence, but by the message of assurance that was transmitted. In many cases, in the absence of musical instruments, people resorted to household objects to produce music: "A pot or a wooden spoon can suffice, if only because their sounds will join those of many other people who, from their balconies and windows, are hoping to create a bond through music" (Taladrid, 2020). A similar pattern was witnessed in India, where professional and amateur musicians performed side by side when the pandemic kicked in. Falguni Pathak, the singer who is famous across the country for her Indi-pop compositions, organized an impromptu balcony concert to wipe out lockdown blues, where she enthralled the neighborhood with her rendition of 'Kahin Door Jab Din Dhale Jaaye', from the classic Hindi film *Anand* (1971), starring Rajesh Khanna and Amitabh Bachchan (Jain, 2020). Besides professionals like Pathak, amateur musicians like Gurgaon-based Vishal Malik, a corporate employee, or the mother-son duo Sunita and Ronojit Bhuyan, assiduously rendered and played instruments like piano and violin from their balconies for the community and paid tribute to the emergency workers. The performances did not remain localized and constricted to their apartment complex or communities, but garnered massive views online as well, thanks to the digital platform, which acted as an intermediary between the local and global audiences of these concerts taking place in the narrow space of the balconies. As Sunita describes, "Sound waves of music travel throughout the atmosphere and have an impact on all human beings and it is scientific. In fact that's the beauty of music. We really wanted to get people together and the best way to reach out is through home concerts online" (Bhuyan as cited in Kahma, 2020). The digital medium, therefore, expanded the limited spatial margins of the balcony into a virtually global one, and translated separate islands of balconies dotting the globe into a virtual archipelago of performers.

The balcony concerts have also dovetailed into ancillary cultural activities. There has been an advent of balcony parties during the pandemic, that in several cases centered around musical performances, or followed it. At the peak of the pandemic, Italian neighborhoods organized wine parties on the balconies to keep their spirits soaring; videos showing citizens raising a toast and clinking wine glasses, which were transported ingeniously from one balcony to another with sticks with a loop (India Today, 2020). In Palermo, a disk jockey garnered massive attention, who threw a balcony party at night for all their neighborhood to enjoy, as "[c]heers and whistles rang out into the night as the unidentified man bellowed into a microphone and waved his hands in the air" (Hassan, 2020). Similarly, the culture of balcony parties surfaced in the apartment complexes in India, in places like Mumbai, Gurgaon, and Delhi, where invitations forwarded on social media platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram to the community members generated pockets of enthusiasts from their respective private balcony spaces. In the case of the residents of an apartment complex in Gurgaon, an invitation for such a party went out on the community social media group, where they were "urged to don festive clothes, bring their own drinks and snacks and take position in the comfort, privacy and safety of their respective balconies. Emcees were designated for each of the towers to make song playlists featuring an eclectic mix of retro, pop, hip-hop, remixes and cha-cha-cha for a 90-minute extravaganza" (Bahl, 2020). The balcony parties underscored a shift in the idea of traditional spaces; while a balcony acts as the transitional zone between the public/outer and the private/inner spaces, social distancing enforced during the pandemic had divested the public space of its 'public' attributes and transformed it into a barren and depopulated zone, the inner sanctum of the house became a zone of forced seclusion, thereby equalizing the melancholic aesthetics of the inside and the outside. These concerts and parties acting as a tool of community organization transformed the balconies into fountainheads of enjoyment and freedom against a backdrop of pandemic-induced morbidity and seclusion. Therefore, the balconies during the pandemic emerged as the quintessential carnivalesque space, endowed with the aspects of familiarity and proximity.

RESPONSES TO THE BALCONY PERFORMANCES

The novel practice of balcony singing, which first notably emerged in Italy, seems to have influenced other regions of the world as well, albeit with diverse patterns of responses. While India mimicked the Italian practice of community aural resistance through her indigenous means, people in countries like the United States, Spain, Germany, and Lebanon, to name a few, have underscored a global response to the Italian practice of aural socialization, by taking to the exterior facets of their apartments, like balconies, rooftops, and windows, “to sing to one another, to applaud and show gratitude to their health-care workers, to play music, and to lift one another’s spirits” (Taylor, 2020). The vehicles of inspiration have primarily been the videos of the Italian performances shared on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Telegram. The primary modes of aural communication remained singing, instrumental performance, and applause; the balcony performances, therefore, constituted a juxtaposition of melodic, harmonic, and percussive elements, with the incorporation of multitudinous forms of music, spanning across genres like classical, folk, popular, jazz, electronic, etc. The performances of musicians like Sofia Ceccato in Rio De Janeiro, Tori Sparks in Barcelona, Karina Núñez in Panama City, Beatriz Berodia in Madrid hailing from genres like classical, rock, jazz, and blues molded the pandemic year into a melting pot of different strands of world music to form one global club of impromptu performances, where each singer is the representative of different communities of people of diverse nationalities, united by a common aural-symbolic bond of solidarity and resilience, where differential musical practices emerging as coping mechanisms and instruments of accommodation against the pandemic gained traction. However, balcony performances were not accepted positively in all corners of the globe. In comic turns of events, these performances gained notoriety: a balcony singer was lambasted with expletives hurled at him by neighbors in Wales; an Israeli performance to imitate the Italian way ended up being derided as loud and loathsome; a German’s attempt to sing his heart out irked the neighbors who summoned the police (Alexandra, 2020). Despite such sporadic events, balcony performances gained traction around the globe, as residents of cities like Paris, Barcelona, Berlin, Vienna, contributed to the pandemic musicscape with instruments ranging from saxophone to clarinet, from flute to bass guitar.

The socio-political implications of the balcony performances have been strikingly formidable nevertheless. With the proliferation of the pandemic across Italy, balcony singing hit the reverse gear as tensions grew in the relatively impoverished southern part of the country, especially in regions like Campania, Sicily, and Calabria, where food and money dwindled, leaving thousands in crisis. Images of long queues at food banks, small shop owners being intimidated to release food for free, rising graphs of theft and arson became common across the country, as people grappled with the fear of poverty and economic turbulence, with the fear of the pandemic taking a backseat (Giuffrida and Tondo, 2020). Massimiliano Panarari, a professor at LUISS Guido Carli, underscored the shift in mass psychology from the zone of the carnivalesque to the arena of despondency by lambasting the bureaucratic apparatus of Italy: “Bureaucracy is the real enemy of this country and in a crisis situation it’s impossible to solve this problem... People may have tried to keep their spirits up at the beginning of the lockdown, but now their thoughts are returning towards the bitter reality of a terribly fragile country” (Giuffrida and Tondo, 2020). Similar conditions prevailed in India as well, as the country stood witness to rising rates of poverty and closure of business establishments, and mass migration of laborers across the states. The opposition castigated the Narendra Modi Government by pointing out that the ‘Janata Curfew’ and the call to the people to express solidarity with the emergency workers battling the pandemic by clapping, banging on the plates, ringing bells, and blowing conch-shells from the balconies, was an attempt by the administration to airbrush the severity of the situation and the government’s ineptitude in handling it. The Janata Curfews of short spans like twelve to fourteen hours were promulgated as an experimental measure to check the proliferation of the pandemic, but critics advocated for a complete lockdown, which was eventually imposed. While some lauded the decision to show solidarity aurally, others opined that the curfew was an attempt at translating the pandemic situation into an event management exercise in the absence of a concrete plan of action, and “the five minutes of organised and popularised noise generation was nothing more than turning the nation into a hysterical collective” (Sinha, 2020). The call to express solidarity brought residents out on their balconies, creating pockets of crowds in the air at the height of social distancing; some even had banners reading ‘Janata Curfew’ hanging from their balconies, which ultimately trivialized the entire enterprise and gave it a color of propaganda, where the Prime Minister Modi desired “to create a ‘mob frenzy’ and engulf the nation into doing the unnecessary” (Sinha, 2020). Though this article has hitherto discussed different dimensions of the balcony performances primarily through the lens of the affirmative, in what follows, it shall focus on the hermeneutics of negativity for the sake of providing a comprehensive view. The juxtaposition of the Italian and Indian responses to the balcony performances shows that though music came to a psychological rescue in the initial stages of the pandemic and acted as a tool to foster community solidarity, one could argue that its effect became diminutive in the face of the sheer aftershocks of the malady, and obliquely reiterated Theodor Adorno’s observation on the impossibility or barbarity of creating art after a cataclysmic event

like the Holocaust (Adorno, 2007: 34). The musical streaks radiating from the balconies, if interpreted in conjunction with the aforementioned scenario, functioned more as elegiac dirges and aural signposts anticipating mass destruction and mayhem, underscoring a country's transition from the arena of normalcy to the chaotic space dubbed the 'new normal' of the pandemic and post-pandemic world. However, the momentary and situational impact these performances had on the common people and the spirit of positivity and solidarity enshrined in them cannot be undermined at any cost.

CONCLUSION

The balcony performances emerged as one of the most spectacular events during the pandemic, which not only functioned as a beacon of hope for many, but also contributed toward kickstarting cultural activities and community building around the world, after they had come to a state of suspension globally. The balconies emerged as liminal spaces or buffer zones between sound and silence, the home and the world, the chaos of the pandemic and the order of the home, the vitality of life and the listlessness of death, and especially between the individual and the community. The clusters of performances from different balconies in a given city created a mirrorwork of segregated individuals attempting to gravitate toward a metaphoric center, which would reestablish community bonding. Modernity has been lambasted as an era of isolation and fragmentation, where competitiveness among individuals overrides community sentiments, epitomized by the "crushing race against a fast-growing economy and even a faster growth in population that has ripped off individuals of contentment and satisfaction" (Kaushal, 2021), and where the threat of alienation persists menacingly. The balcony performances, therefore, emerged as the medium through which to reorganize and reintegrate individuals against the vacuous competitiveness of modern life in the 21st Century, exposed by the horrors of the pandemic. These performances started as a community practice in the Italian neighborhoods, before emerging as a global phenomenon, which could be described as the 'glocalization' of the balcony performances by borrowing the ideas of Roland Robertson (1995). It was made possible through the mass exchange of videos and recordings on social media, which largely contributed to the dissemination of a local cultural praxis to global citizens. These performances, therefore, operated on two levels: the global and the local, resulting in the simultaneity and the co-presence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies (Robertson, 1995). The performances also functioned both as an analgesic and a prophetic device; on the one hand, they emerged as a potent device to boost public morale and as an aural shield against the pandemic, but they also, in a metaphoric manner, prophesied the massive scale of immanent death and destruction to be unleashed by the pandemic in due course. However, for a period of time at least, the aesthetics of pleasure and positivity emanating from these performances reigned supreme with humanity reclaiming agency in the void created by the deadly pandemic.

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Book Review

Fashion as Creative Economy

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McRobbie, A., Strutt, D. and Bandinelli, C. (2023). *Fashion as Creative Economy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

In June 2023, on Biggerstaff Road in the East London borough of Newham, a heritage blue plaque was unveiled to commemorate the life of the late fashion designer Alexander McQueen. The youngest of six children of an East End taxi driver, Lee Alexander McQueen spent almost his entire childhood in Stratford attending local state schools before studying tailoring at Newham College. At the unveiling, before a sizeable crowd, Rokhsana Fiaz, the Mayor of Newham, suggested proudly that McQueen ‘exemplifies the brilliance of homegrown talent that has emerged from Newham’. No doubt McQueen was a brilliant talent – as tailor, designer, and artist. But as the Mayor noted, he also came from *somenbere*, a particular place – a milieu of sorts. McQueen was heralded as an ordinary person who became extraordinary in the world of haute couture – but also someone that today’s state educated kids of Newham might reasonably hope to emulate.

But what are the chances of Newham – or anywhere – producing another Alexander McQueen? What combinations of talent and opportunity might now be necessary to allow other kinds of ordinary people to become extraordinary? Or, even, much less ambitiously, what are the options available for ordinary people to now maintain *any* kind of occupation in the career structures of designer fashion? In *Fashion as Creative Economy*, Angela McRobbie, Daniel Strutt and Carolina Bandinelli offer some richly-drawn case studies that focus centrally on three distinct urban milieux and their differing capacities to generate ordinary – or extraordinary – careers in fashion design.

In London – a global capital of couture – we encounter emerging and established designers tangled in the threads of what the authors identify as an increasingly capitalised and competitive ‘milieu of labour’. This term is used vividly to capture the concentrated nexus of institutions, governmental apparatuses and field conditions that serve both to enable and inhibit the construction of a creative career. In London’s milieu of fashion labour – where a fervid mix of urban regeneration, property speculation and cost of living crises meets the hollowing out of the social infrastructures that once enabled an alternative fashion economy to thrive – we find young designers struggling to develop or maintain careers that were hitherto open to a wider population. The authors conclude that ‘London is no longer affordable for young creative people from working-class backgrounds who, in the not so distant past, had been able to make a decisive and significant contribution to the arts and culture’ (p. 44). Strung with debt, stripped of welfare supports, and unable to rent affordably, would-be designers have suffered from the more general unravelling of possibility amidst the ‘degradation of labour’ (p. 67) – the withering of sustainably waged work sufficient to support the development of a creative career. What price a new McQueen now?

However, if the prospects for the ordinary London designer appear bleak, in Berlin a more vibrant milieu of labour is identified. Away from the haute couture spotlight, and the centre of global fashion, an independent design industry thrives. An economy of ‘ethical and sustainable fashion practice’ (p. 92) is supported by a relatively

enabling system of state welfare, a less pressurised housing market, and a more socially integrated cultural infrastructure; all buoyed by a healthy market of local producer-consumers. Yet, while Berlin is used to exemplify a progressive potential that other cities might seek to harness or adopt, the authors identify the threats now being posed by the 'predatory forces' (p. 79) of real estate and financialised capital, ever eager to stitch themselves into the fabric of the city and iron out any stubborn creases of difference.

Milan provides the third case and here we encounter a group of (mostly) young female designers making their way in the traditional and patriarchal confines of what was once termed the 'Third Italy'. The conservative precincts of Italian designer fashion houses are identified as somewhat remotely located from the day-to-day efforts of these resourceful women. Such designers have 'merged a craft ethos with the artisanship and the know-how prised out of male hands and now implanted into these more feminized atelier spaces' (p. 121). The milieu of labour here relies on a complex and sometimes contradictory inheritance of family-owned (and therefore classed) manufacturing, established design traditions, and the energy of an emergent feminist ethos and spirit.

The remaining chapter focuses on the impacts of fast fashion and e-commerce on the different milieux of fashion labour – and the consequences of new 'click and collect' logistical systems of manufacture and delivery. Here waged labour and good jobs - especially for lower skilled workers - are disappearing in the rush to embrace fashion tech and more efficient distribution systems. While the warehouse, transport and retail workers suffer further labour degradation, the consequences for independent designers are hardly more propitious, as corporate power further consolidates.

At the heart of this book is a concern with the ethics of the fashion industry and its dubious legacy of labour exploitations, environmental impacts and ecological damages. The authors therefore turn their final attention to the need for a greater 'moral accountability' (p. 146) for fashion – and the need for urgent reform. But neither are they hairshirt puritans, and don't fail to remind us that fashion – as popular culture, taste and aesthetic – continues to animate and inspire millions of ordinary people, as a vital part of the 'politics and pleasures of everyday life' (p. 152). Alexander McQueen once said that 'fashion should be a form of escapism, not a form of imprisonment' – a means to other possible worlds. In its vital pursuit of a 'new fashion imaginary' (p. 2) *Fashion as Creative Economy* invites us to break with the current confines of an industry that has become more socially exclusive, overcapitalised and ecologically irresponsible, and in perpetual danger of further degrading the lives of those upon whose talents and labours it most evidently depends.

Book Review

Black Everyday Lives, Material Culture and Narrative: Tings in de House

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Sobers, S.-N. (2023). *Black Everyday Lives, Material Culture and Narrative: Tings in de House*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

This book is a remarkable exploration of the material culture of *everyday life*, which uses multiple forms and styles of writing and visual expression to examine the everyday experiences of African heritage Black people living in post-war Britain. Using a Small Anthropology approach and the framework of a family home, the materiality of the objects therein acts as a mechanism for reflection and as a focus for interdisciplinary social, historical and cultural analysis.

Sobers skilfully interweaves accounts and representations of lived experience with cultural and creative works: from popular culture, the author's creative practices, and from other artists and cultural producers. These are interlaced with existing research and studies to explore narratives and discourses concerning Black cultural heritages, histories and identities.

I felt as though I was invited into the different rooms of each chapter (front door/hallway, living room, front room, kitchen, bedrooms, bathroom, garden). Each reveals and contextualises stories evoked by the spaces and the selected 'Tings in de House' (signs, photos, television, sewing machine, armchair, radiogram, pictures, souvenirs and ornaments, Dutch pot, rice, Afro comb, medication, suitcase/grip, soil).

The author fuses auto-ethnographic accounts of his experience as a second-generation Black Briton whose parents emigrated from the Caribbean to the UK in the 1960s, with the experiences of his family and friends, other research participants and collaborators. These portraits and recollections inform and inspire a collection of studies which together act as a 'time capsule and a communicator' (p. 2), exploring intergenerational meaning-making.

As a result, this book contributes ideas about and approaches to understanding African diasporic black lives through the lenses of history and culture, attending to a plurality of voices and perspectives. A key strength and contribution of the book is its recognition of the connections and congruences within and between a diverse range of experiences and representations of Black lives, whilst identifying divergences and dissonances and holding both in tension.

For example, in Ch. 7, '(Front Room) The Last Supper', Sobers discusses signs of religious observance evoked by his father's da Vinci-inspired picture of the Last Supper hung in the front room, featuring a white Jesus. In contrast, Sobers' alternative Rastafari-inspired picture of the last supper featuring Black Jesus, is hung in his teenage bedroom directly above. As an 'active agent' in the space, Sobers reflects on the pictures' embodied values and associated narratives. Drawing on the lyrics of Bunny Wailer, depictions of Black Jesus in Film and TV and contemporary artwork of Black Jesus, he examines how these pictures and representations illuminate the

contradictions of religion and theology as a tool and resource of both Black oppression and Black empowerment, (e.g., of colonisation and decolonisation), cross-generationally, transnationally and ideologically.

In exploring *evocations* prompted by everyday living materials, this book offers a range of reflexive ideas about familial and/or familiar private spaces, and relational dynamics, as these connect to processes of socialisation and racialisation. For example, in Ch. 2, '(Living Room) Photo Wall', Sobers explores family photos as harnessing 'the essence of embodied personal connection with spatial presence' (p. 21), which 'even in silent rooms' are 'bursting with noise' (p. 33). Inspired by a collection of family photos located on the wall above the mantelpiece curated by his mum for whom he cared while writing the book, Sobers looks at the stories these summon, finding narratives of kinship, historical realignment, and political reclamation, resilience and emancipation, traced to the projects of slavery and colonialism. Using his own and others' photographic work and practices, which seek to reclaim and remake images, Sobers demonstrates 'the power of reclaiming and owning the narrative for oneself' (p. 32).

In dealing with the importance of the home as a site of social and cultural history the book provides important insights about identity and belonging. For instance, in creatively exploring and excavating layers of memories and meanings connected to *belongings* the book takes an innovative approach to the study of material culture, particularly of homes which can operate as a 'palimpsest of spatio-temporal contexts' building discursive narratives that articulate personal and social relations (Whitaker and McHugh, 2023). And as Sobers shows in numerous places in the book, the Covid pandemic brought the bounds of home and significance of social relationships into sharper focus for all.

Furthermore, this work resonates strongly with contemporary studies of identity-creation and the everyday practices of diasporic communities that underline how 'belonging is fostered in... the "microsocial"', referring to 'the everyday practices and rituals' and 'spaces people claim for themselves' (Saltus, 2023). Synchronously, in making Black lived experiences visible and audible, Sobers' work, like Saltus', highlights wider narratives of non-belonging that fuel discrimination and produce negative socio-economic impacts and outcomes, stratified by ethnicity and race. There are many examples of this cited in the book, including the UK Government's hostile approach to immigration, embodied by the recent Windrush Scandal that disproportionately impacted Caribbean elders.

Relatedly, Sobers reflects on the profound carrying costs of being an active agent in anti-racist and anti-colonialist struggles (e.g., 'the persistent drive for the embodied reclaiming of African heritage' (p. 104)). This speaks to contemporary political and philosophical debates about the politics of Black agency and the rendering and reduction of Black life to a state of oppression (Stewart, 2021) such that 'space for joy, leisure, frivolity, and the "lighter" aspects of life seem like a luxury of time that we can seldom afford. Though, of course, joy, leisure, and laughter in life are a necessity'" (Sobers, p. 103). Testimony to this idea, the book communicates a spectrum of human experience, emotion and thought. Through the rich texture of chosen words and images, Black life is profoundly and deliberately attested arousing celebration, affirmation and validation, alongside sober and melancholic reflections on Black lives lost, taken and diminished.

This book also opens up ideas about the importance of *process*. Firstly, through its use of mixed methods and approaches, to explore story, memory and meaning (e.g., research materials and outputs include transcripts, museum exhibits, photos, paintings, symbols, sculptures, social media content, fiction, *post-scripts, music, food/cooking and literature).

Secondly, the book adopts a position that does not seek to present a set of universal claims which essentialise Black people's experiences, but instead, by means of critical subjectivity, offers examples and opportunities to stimulate dialogue and informed understanding. For example: Ch. 7's discussion of the sewing machine and sewing cultures, linking to notions of identity for Sobers' parents' generation of Caribbean elders, offers a departure point for a discussion of the gendered dynamics of household and domestic work. And Ch. 2's vignette of a class discussion about photographic representation between the author and his students signals possibilities for enabling conversations about intersectionality.

***Post-script**

The author states that this is not a 'traditional' book. Arguably, this is not a conventional book review and a post-script, which Sobers uses so effectively as a mechanism throughout the book, affords me a different register to conclude.

Shawn-Naphtali Sobers is a colleague and a friend. This is important to know, in the spirit of transparency, honouring the tenets of Small Anthropology. We have collaborated and co-authored work, but not specifically related to the core substance of this book. Given this, I felt compelled to work with careful yet critical consideration.

Candidly, as an academic and creative practitioner, shaped by cultural and visual studies, this book excited and educated me. It raises unanswered questions, but by design not omission. In each chapter, I encountered something new conceptually and practically and I found myself scribbling notes energetically, in the margins, like a student.

This is one scribbled note that shouts playfully yet conclusively from the page:
'Small Anthropology, Big Ideas!'

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Book Review

Youth Culture and the Post-war Novel: From Teddy Boys to Trainspotting

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Ross, I. (2019). *Youth Culture and the Post-war Novel: From Teddy Boys to Trainspotting*. London: Bloomsbury.

With *Youth Culture and the Post-war Novel* Ian Ross has persuasively contributed to a somewhat neglected element of contemporary literary discourse, blending a fresh approach to close reading and narrative scrutiny with elements of wider discourse analysis, locating – despite his initial protestation – the sociological in the modern novel via an understanding of the skilful weaving of youth cultural awareness and the zeitgeist with the time-honoured problematics of simply *writing about youth* and their transitions.

On encountering this book – the subject matter of which I have anticipated for some time – I found myself aware that the synthesising of the duality of the important role of post-war youth in the dynamics of social, economic and cultural change, and the ‘representation’ of such dynamics in literary fiction, had been arguably underplayed in literary and sociological academic dialogue until now. As an introduction to such discourse this book works well, taking the broader approaches of contemporaries such as Dominic Head (2002) and working instead with a forensically detailed analysis of a variety of dynamics present – as one may imagine – in novels that have, at their heart, young people encountering what Ross acknowledges as transition and change within British society from the 1950s to the dawn of the new millennia, and in the interconnected flow of time and experience itself. It appears, therefore, as literary in character as it is sociological and, to be sure, there are moments at the outset where Ross attempts to wrong-foot sociologists of literary form, declaring boldly that this work is not ‘sociological’ but merely ‘popular literary criticism’ (2019: 9). However, despite the undoubted strengths of his researches and the presentation of his theory, the distancing from sociology is perplexing; it is arguably a strength of its academic vanguard that this work may join a plethora of studies into youth culture that focus on mass societal and media affront and associative moral panics, retrospective urbanity and the subcultural, the creative and the musical, and resistance to the mainstream (e.g. Cohen, 1972; Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979; McRobbie, 2000; Bennett, 2000). While Ross certainly pays attention to these mentioned criteria, his work prioritises *the novel* and narratives of youth, the subject matter enveloped by his choice of case studies arguably *intersectional*, with masculinity, sexuality, race, and social class particularly strong throughout, though female subjectivity/identity could feature more. However, the apparently minor – but crucial – distinction between *youth* ‘culture’ and *subculture* can be problematic. In his defence, Ross claims that the novels chosen for analysis involve or reflect youth culture rather than just rites of passage, but the reader is challenged to see this beyond the conventional microanalysis of identity and strategy, plotting a path into life often from sunken platforms of inferiority that essentially point towards rites of passage (sex, independence, employment, education etc.) rather than ‘youth cultures’ that are more conventionally associated within the public oeuvre via obtrusive styles, popular musical genres, and liminality. Consequently, one detects a *socially reproductive* element in the narratives of, inter alia, *Absolute Beginners*, *Saturday*

Night, Sunday Morning, A Clockwork Orange, The Rachel Papers, The Buddha of Suburbia, Trainspotting et al., incorporating an intergenerational pattern of reproduction via various bildungsroman/picaresque approaches, as well as the attachment of signification to the narratives via an explanation of the embedding of such works into their places in history alongside the technique of conjoining the narratives to the prevailing 'youth cultures' of their era. However, the big question is whether such works adequately and actively *represent* the era or the culture; the connectivity is occasionally precarious. The novels chosen all broadly do 'the same thing' in representing transition, resistance, and social experimentation attached to the absent certainties of identity; the 'youth culture' association often appears peripheral. Thus, one is left with a sense that the afterlife of the novels attaches more significance to a representation of youth culture via a centrifugal effect in critique and interpretation – via script treatments, soundtrack music, leading actors etc. – with the original novel on the *inside*, the written text existing in its own time and the textual analysis benefitting from decades of development. Thus, *Absolute Beginners, A Clockwork Orange, and Trainspotting* are merely stories about youth and experience and only the associative and attentive media can be described as pertaining to youth cultural significance; it is therefore possible that Anthony Burgess did *not* 'create the skinhead' (as Ross debates within), but instead that the skinhead saw himself reflected in *A Clockwork Orange's* celluloid exhilaration and attendant media controversy that simultaneously attached further significance to the perceived connection between youth, violence, style/fashion, working-class identity, and music. It's a fine line between lived realities and commercial exploitative hegemony. Thus, I found myself early on wondering whether Ross planned to incorporate the notion of self-aware authorship throughout, namely that the authors that he chose to feature conscientiously conjoined their own creative narratives with the presence of a youth culture, or whether such association became coincidental and conceivably developed an external youth culture as an effect of readership. This issue was never convincingly resolved or, indeed, credibly encountered throughout the duration but perhaps that was never the point. Ross argues convincingly that *generational conflict* fashioned the writing he analysed, but it is also possible that dislocated writers produced dislocated writing that simply drew upon, or was applied to, prevailing subcultural mores and values.

Despite these slight (and they are, on the whole, only *slight*) reservations on what may be seen as an unresolved tension in the subject matter, this is a valuable book because, via its engagingly written style, Ross manages to convince the reader (perhaps unintentionally) that the sociological is inherently present in the contextualising of youth culture and modern British literature, meshing together the intersectional drivers of identity and the macro dynamics of social and economic change, situating literature in time and creating a useful dualism of synchronic and diachronic understanding of mores, values, music, style, prevailing norms, and reflexivity. Ross elevates his narrative into a discussion of the frictional parent- and youth culture duality in fictional narrative and his choices clarify the relationships between social, cultural, and literary history and the battle for definitive authority within novels concerned with transformation. This is where this book works best; it is a poignant reminder that youth transition, via chance and circumstances, can be connected to what we *have* and what we *lack* and rarely do these kernels of fortune relate to one another for long. Ian Ross therefore demonstrates that the post-war novel is a useful device to contemplate how we all become what we are.

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