

Is ‘Everyone welcome’?: Intersectionality, inclusion, and the extension of cultural hierarchies on Emma Watson’s feminist book club, ‘Our shared shelf’

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Abstract:

Emma Watson started Our Shared Shelf (OSS), a feminist book club, on Goodreads in 2016. Through her work on gender-equality, Watson has accumulated enough cultural capital to be viewed as a legitimate tastemaker in selecting books for a feminist audience, and fits into what Rehberg Sedo describes as the *trusted other* (Rehberg Sedo, 2004). However, this article argues that Watson creates cultural hierarchies, and extends her feminist brand, through her book choices and the way that she interacts with the OSS community. Despite attempts to diversify the bi-monthly book choices, there has been a preference towards English-language books written by cisgendered, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual, white women. Therefore, the list did not represent the international and intersectional nature of OSS: something several readers voice concern about. Additionally, this article examines how the readers’ relationship to their celebrity tastemaker reinforces hierarchies. Engaging in social media can be a performative act: users can construct an identity whilst engaging with social issues. However, there is a danger that a dominant narrative can influence identities and interpretations. Consequently, OSS replicates and upholds patterns of dominance and exclusion and is not an egalitarian space, despite framing itself as one.

Keywords: book clubs; reading groups; Goodreads; feminism; feminist celebrities; inclusivity; intersectionality

Introduction

In January 2016 actress and UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson started Our Shared Shelf (OSS) – a feminist book club – on Goodreads.¹ The club prompted enthusiastic responses on social media, from ordinary and celebrity readers alike, and garnered a

positive response from the mainstream media.² The idea for the book club was originally broadcast to Watson's followers on Twitter,³ and to date OSS has over 200,000⁴ members from across the globe. Members are connected by their shared interest in reading books that challenge the patriarchy; and while OSS is a feminist book club, its membership is not *limited* to women. In fact, Watson explicitly states that 'Everyone is welcome' in the group description (Watson, 2016a). The focus of this article will be a case study of the OSS reading community that examines, particularly, the intersectional nature of the book group and the influence of Watson as a celebrity literary-tastemaker.

Book clubs and literary communities have been a popular way for scholars to explore shared and individual reading habits and practices, and the social functions of reading. Scholars have looked at these communities from many different perspectives, including gender, age, ethnicity, and social class; communities operating during different time-periods; and, the proliferation of book-clubs across different media.⁵ Many of these studies emphasise the political nature of books clubs and reading groups: Long (2003), for example, argues that reading 'can never be divorced from questions of power, privilege, exclusion, and social distinction' (2003: 16). Of particular relevance to this research are the power structures and hierarchies associated with on- and off-line book clubs (Boyarin, 1993; Long, 1986; Hartley, 2001; Allington, 2011). These power structures are particularly evident when we examine Watson's brand of feminism and the selection of the monthly/bi-monthly book in relation to the OSS demographic.⁶ The research presented in this article is significant because it re-emphasises the influence of celebrity role models (particularly for young people), not only in creating and supporting social movements, but also in shaping the literary culture around those movements. As this article argues, such influence can perpetuate cultural hierarchies rather than dismantle them. My analysis below demonstrates that OSS replicates and upholds patterns of dominance and exclusion: it is not an egalitarian space, despite framing itself as one.

This article traces the evolution of reading clubs before considering the emergence of feminist celebrities. These two phenomena are connected in the case study of OSS. The case study begins with an overview of the OSS reader demographics followed by analyses of the group reading list, as chosen by Watson, and the reasons why members joined the club. This will help us understand if OSS, as a book club, is reflective of its community. Lastly, Watson's engagement with the OSS community will be investigated through the study of the official book announcements.

The evolution and 'celebrification' of reading clubs and feminist culture

Book clubs have been around for centuries but they have been transformed in the last couple of decades by popular multi-media phenomena like Oprah's Book Club (Rehberg Sedo, 2002; Davies, 2004; Rooney, 2005; Konchar Farr, 2005).⁷ Celebrity endorsements of books, particularly popular clubs such as Oprah's Book Club and the Richard and Judy Book Club,⁸ have had a profound effect on publishers and (particularly women) readers (Konchar Farr, 2005; Rooney, 2005; Butler et al, 2005; Driscoll, 2008; Ramone & Cousins, 2011).

Hartley (2001) found that many readers were spurred into joining a book club after celebrity endorsement of a book: something that this current study of OSS confirms. New media technologies have extended the popularity of such book clubs into the digital age by encouraging social engagement, through reading, on a global scale (Scharber, 2009; Gruzd & Rehberg Sedo, 2012). This research about OSS builds upon previous studies and looks at book clubs in the age of social media, particularly in the context of the rise of a new generation of celebrity cultural-tastemakers.

A recent example of the book club evolution is the spate of celebrity book clubs popping up on social platforms. Celebrities – such as Mark Zuckerberg and his A Year of Books book club (Facebook), Watson’s OSS club (Goodreads), and Reese Witherspoon’s #RWbookclub (Instagram) – are creating new online reading communities and new reading trends. Celebrities are able to demonstrate their cultural capital – an asset that is often overlooked in tabloid depictions of them – on social media through photographs of their favorite books, etc. (Bourdieu, 1986).⁹ In a similar vein as Oprah’s book club, such endorsements impact the publishing industry with book publicists keen to feature upcoming titles in these celebrity-driven reading communities (Crair, 2017). While this article will not explore the economic impact of Watson’s book club choices, it will consider their social and cultural implications. We can note, however, that sales of Gloria Steinem’s *My Life on the Road* rose after it was chosen as the first title for OSS (Cowdrey, 2016).¹⁰

Scholars have examined how book clubs, particularly those established by non-traditional literary gatekeepers, or ‘cultural outsiders’, are often connected to middlebrow literature, especially when the book club is composed of women (Hochman, 2011: 600; Rehberg Sedo, 2011). Such celebrity tastemakers are often regarded as the ‘wrong cultural authorities’ (Rehberg Sedo, 2011: 1162). The feminist celebrity movement is often seen in the same kind of negative light. By feminist celebrity, I refer to celebrities who identify as feminists, not feminist scholars/writers who have become celebrities and who are sometimes described as ‘the celebrity feminist’¹¹ (Wicke, 1994). Some commentators brand the feminism promoted by celebrities as *Feminism-Lite* – a diluted and commercialized, neo-liberalist/marketplace type of feminism – and complain that, ‘Feminism should not be something that needs a seductive marketing campaign’ (Bullock & Fernald, 2003; Gay, 2014). However, feminist celebrities do make feminism more visible, and thus assist in publicising and popularising issues on gender equality.

While feminist celebrities can introduce feminism to a wider audience, their influence may also have a detrimental effect. A recent study found that feminist celebrities can be understood to trivialise feminism and thus deter people from engaging with it. The study, conducted over two years, found that 80% of the 6000 study participants cared less about gender-equality issues when they were endorsed by a celebrity, and many participants were skeptical about a celebrity using feminism as a promotional tool (Hosie, 2016).¹² Additionally, Keller and Ringrose (2013) found that teenage girls were cynical about the authenticity of feminist celebrities. These studies contradict numerous others on celebrity influence, which found that celebrity endorsements of political and social issues

could increase support for the causes (Jackson & Darrow, 2005; Austin et al., 2008; Wheeler, 2009; Harris & Ruth, 2015; Wymer & Drollinger, 2015, Loader et al, 2015). Furthermore, McRobbie (2013) and Taylor (2016) both found that postfeminists/fourth-wave feminists,¹³ including the millennial group that are particularly engaged with the Watson et al strands of feminism, were suspicious about the celebrification and commodification of so-called marketplace-feminism.¹⁴ This individualist type of feminism is at odds with the non-hierarchical ethos of intersectional feminism (Marshall, 1997; Showalter, 2001; Taylor, 2016). However, Wicke asserts that, instead of denigrating the feminism promoted by celebrities as ‘a realm of ideological ruin,’ we must ‘recognize that the energies of celebrity imagery are fuelling feminist discourse and political activity as never before’ (1994: 753). As such, this article will look at the growing intersection between literary and [feminist] celebrity culture, and, through a mixed-method approach (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2011), will explore how this new generation of literary tastemakers is creating and reinforcing cultural hierarchies, while extending narratives surrounding contemporary feminism.

In order to convince a mass audience that they can be ‘trusted as the curator,’ *cultural outsiders* must demonstrate some degree of cultural knowledge or authority without having a vested commercial interest (Collins, 2010: 82). Through her work on gender inequality, Watson has accumulated enough cultural capital to be viewed, at least in some circles, as a *legitimate* tastemaker in selecting books for a feminist audience, despite the cynicism displayed towards other feminist celebrities¹⁵ (Bourdieu, 1984). Not all celebrities can assume this role as a literary and cultural intermediary as easily as Watson has: it is clear that a hierarchy of credibility exists (Hovland and Weiss, 1951; Jackson, 2007). Marsden (2018) explores this in her study of reality television star Kim Kardashian West’s joint book club with model Chrissy Teigen: the announcement of the book club attracted mixed reactions, including a tweet exclaiming, ‘I didn’t know you could read’ (Marsden, 2018).¹⁶ Watson’s celebrity feminism and her achieved celebrity in the field of film elevate her into a position of power and authority that legitimizes her stances on issues such as feminism. Marshall suggests that ‘celebrity status confers on the person a certain discursive power: within society, the celebrity is a voice above others, a voice that is channelled into the media systems as being legitimately significant’ (1997: x). Watson’s fame from playing Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter film adaptations has helped her migrate from her field (as an actress) into a different field (as a spokesperson for gender equality/social activist). While Watson may not profit financially from being a cultural tastemaker, some commentators believe that she has made feminism an ‘intrinsic building block of her public identity’ (Edelstein, 2017). However, Watson has also received criticisms about her brand of feminism, from dismissals of her HeForShe campaign, which some believe undermines the efforts of feminist activists who do not need endorsements from men, to her comments over Beyoncé’s sexuality, and her provocative *Vanity Fair* cover (McCarthy, 2014; Edelstein, 2017; Thomas, 2017). Despite this, Watson’s authority elevates her stance on feminism over others. Taylor surmises that, ‘authorizing one set of speakers obviously entails the elision of others’ and asks the questions: ‘which feminism, and whose feminism?’ (2016: 32). This

study explore whether Watson's brand of feminism—her privileges and organisation-affiliations—influence her choice of books for the club. As Claire Armistead, associate editor for culture at *The Guardian*, surmises:

Emma Watson with her feminist classics is placing herself as a young thinking woman but doing it through her position as a UN ambassador is quite structured... Similarly, if someone wants to project themselves as a fun person they are going to choose fun books... Emma Watson will have people advising her, probably in order to push the kind of books the organisation thinks people should be reading (Thomas, 2017).

Before focusing on the case study of OSS in more depth, it is worth noting the location of the club within a series of technological and social formations. The proliferation of more informal (physical/offline) reading groups coincided with the rise of feminism, and the development of feminist consciousness-raising groups in the 1960s and 70s (Harlan, 1998; Rehberg Sedo, 2011). Digital media technologies have enabled a multitude of (often ignored) voices to come together in vibrant online communities, including a new generation of feminist consciousness-raising groups (Herring et al, 2002; Al-Rawi, 2014). Traditional structures and hierarchies are often replicated and reinforced in the digital sphere – in particular 'literary taste and taste hierarchies are influenced by social structures' – but equally there are many alternative spaces where marginalized individuals are shaping their own cultural and political engagement (Rehberg Sedo, 2011: 1154). The growing popularity of OSS is another illustration of how technology can help with community-building and critical discussion, challenging established social and cultural norms, and the development of social movements (Harder, Howard, & Rehberg Sedo, 2015). In this sense, Watson's book club fits into the fourth-wave of feminism, which is characterised by technology: social media, in particular, plays an important role in uniting movements across the globe and including the intersections of identity (Cochrane, 2013).¹⁷

Methodology

Goodreads is 'the world's largest' social reading, reviewing, marketing, and book discovery website: it launched in 2007 and was sold to Amazon in 2013 (Flood, 2013; Goodreads, 2017). The website allows readers, authors, and publishers to connect to each other and, despite initial concerns about being subsumed into Amazon, it is thriving: there are currently over sixty-five million users, sixty-eight million reviews, and 214,000 author accounts (Goodreads 2017; Reid, 2017).¹⁸ There are thousands¹⁹ of groups within the Goodreads book community; however, OSS is the largest with nearly 224,000 members. The next biggest groups are the Goodreads Librarians Group with 77,179 members, and Oprah's Book Club (Official) with 29,554 members. It is interesting to note that OSS has nearly seven times more members than Oprah's Book Club (Official): an indication of Watson's reach with the Goodreads demographic.²⁰ OSS is a public group and, according to Watson, 'Everyone is

welcome' (Watson, 2016a). This declaration connects into Watson's work for the HeForShe campaign, which invites men to participate in conversations about gender inequality. Watson acts as the book club leader stating in an early communication, 'I will post some questions/quotes to get things started, but I would love for this to grow into an open discussion with and between you all' (Watson, 2016a). However, in addition to Watson, there are nine other moderators (most of whom are women) who maintain the orderliness of this reading community.²¹ OSS reached 100,000 members within a month of its launch, which led Watson to proclaim, 'It's so much more than I had allowed myself to imagine it could be' (Watson, 2016b).

A Netnographic case study of OSS was undertaken from June 2017 to November 2017 (Kozinets, Dolbec & Earley, 2014). The data collected during this period enabled me to examine the changing role of celebrity influencers on literary culture, and to look at hierarchies in celebrity online book clubs. I focussed the study on the examination of inclusiveness – particularly the *intersectionality* – of the reading choices and on a consideration of how the transnational and multi-genre mix of feminist texts was curated in this group. A third, related, intention was to investigate how the OSS book club extends the narratives surrounding contemporary feminism. The case study used a mixed-methods approach. This involved: considering the ethics and protocols of researching online communities;²² building and analysing a corpus of the first fifteen books on the OSS reading list; conducting a demographic analysis of a random sample of OSS members; and, undertaking a thematic analysis of Watson's introductory comments about each book in the reading list as well as those appearing in the thread where OSS members can introduce themselves. It is important to note that this study examines the first two years of OSS only; there have been some improvements (specifically in the selection of books) in subsequent years.²³

OSS group members

OSS is a very active group with twenty-seven sections and many threads and comments under each section. The sections include discussions about each individual book but also encourage discussion about feminism (121 topics, 8124 comments) and intersectionality (42 topics, 2,527 comments). There is also a section in which members can arrange local, Skype, or email meet-ups (103 topics, 3,834 comments), which highlights the offline influence of the book club and, as Long observes, helps us 'see people in the process of creating new connections, new meanings, and new relationships' (Long, 2003: 22). Additionally, the Feminism in 'Country Here' (25 topics, 1148 comments) and the 'Multilanguage Index' (10 topics, 135 comments) sections demonstrate the international nature of the group.

Goodreads enables users to include demographic information and also to show when they joined the social network.²⁴ Such information can be public (i.e. all Goodreads members can view it), mixed (some information can be viewed by all members and the rest can be viewed by the users' friends or only the user only), empty (where the user has not added any demographic information to their profile), or private (the information can be

viewed by the users' friends or only the user). Using a random sample of the OSS group, demographic information²⁵ and information about when the user joined Goodreads was aggregated, anonymised, and analysed to understand book club membership.²⁶ Firstly, details of the OSS group members were identified by their user homepage URLs.²⁷ There were 206,384 OSS members on 31st October 2017. Using a confidence level of 95% and an interval level of 2%, the sample size was identified as 2374 members. Each user homepage URL was assigned a random number and the smallest 2374 numbers were downloaded as the sample. The public information collected from this sample was: age, gender, location, and date the user joined Goodreads. Out of the sample, there were 1663 (70%) accounts where all of the demographic information was publicly available; 683 (29%) accounts with either one or more pieces of information not publicly available;²⁸ and 28 (1%) public accounts where the user had not added any demographic information.²⁹

While book clubs were traditionally populated by white, middle-class women, they are now comprised of a more diverse group of individuals: online books clubs have supported this increase in inclusivity (Long, 2003; Barstow, 2003; Rehberg Sedo, 2004).³⁰ Readers can participate in online forums 'regardless of factors such as cultural or socio-economic background, gender, reading level or geography' (Rehberg Sedo, 2011: 8) and can choose to participate anonymously. However, this does not mean that online book clubs are egalitarian, digital public spheres (Habermas, 1991). Collins (1991) found that, despite the removal of demographic markers – such as age, gender, and ethnicity – online book club participants still emphasized their social and educational background to predicate their authority. This behaviour appeared in OSS with some users giving information about their educational background, including those who had studied feminist theory at higher education level, in their introductory comments. Book clubs still tend to be dominated by women (Long, 2003), with Thelwall and Kousha (2017) finding that around three quarters of Goodreads users are women. The number of women-identified members was much higher for OSS, despite the club being open to everyone. 2316 (97.6%) of the OSS sample included public details about their gender identity on their profiles: 2177 (91.7%) were women and 139 (5.9%) were men.³¹ This result is unsurprising given the focus of the book group, and is in line with recent findings that readers prefer books written by authors who identify as the same gender (Flood, 2014). Many women referred to other members/the OSS community, as 'sisters', 'sisterhood', 'community of strong women' and used other women-oriented gendered terms, thereby overlooking the possibility that users of OSS might identify as men. In fact, two self-identified men used the introductions thread (analysed below) to ask whether they could join the club.

As detailed below, OSS was mostly comprised of younger women; however, the gender divide was closer in the middle age-brackets. Although there were more group members that were men in the 19-25 and 26-35 age-brackets (42 in each) than any other, the 56-65 age-range included a higher percentage of men. In fact, men were best represented in 36-65 age-range, and worst represented in the under 18 and over 65 brackets (see table 1). While the OSS sample included a mix of ages³² (the youngest

members [eight] were 16 and the oldest member [one] was 74), the group is populated by a younger generation of users: 83 (3.5%) were teenagers, (16-19), 802 (33.8%) were 25 and under; 1318 (55.5%) were 30 and under; 1649 (69.5%) were 40 and under; and 165 (7%) were over 40. The average age of the sample was 28.6 years old: Watson’s age when she began OSS.

Age bracket	% of the sample	Women %	Men %	Location: English-speaking country %	Joined in Jan 2016 %	Number of countries
Under 18	1	100	0	65.2	78.3	11
18-25	23.8	93	5.4	43	21	70
26-35	31.3	93.7	5.7	57.8	12	63
36-45	7.1	92.3	7.7	72.2	5.9	23
46-55	2.9	89.7	8.8	79.4	8.8	10
56-65	1.1	74	26	92.6	7.4	3
66+	0.2	100	0	80	20	1
No age info available	22.4	92.5	5.3	53.7	22.4	70
No ‘gender’ info available	1.2	n/a	n/a	n/a	21.4	n/a

Table 1: OSS sample by age bracket³³

The OSS sample was international: the 2188 (92.2%) users that added geographic locations were from 91 different countries.³⁴ Most of the users were from North America (967 users: 40.7%) and Europe (836: 35.2%), although Asia (170: 7.2%), Australasia (ninety-seven users: 4.1%), South America (eighty-eight: 2.7%), and Africa (thirty: 1.3%) were also represented. The majority (1277 users: 53.8%) of the sample were from countries that are majority native-English-speaking.³⁵ This varied with the different age brackets (see table 1): the 18-25 range is the most diverse, in terms of number of different countries (70) but it is also the only bracket where the majority of readers are from countries where English is not the native language. Diversity of language and location was less represented in the upper age brackets: all of the users aged 56+ (31 users: 1.3% of the sample) were from three different countries: the USA (29), the UK (1), and Italy (1).³⁶ Additionally, while the women were from a more diverse range of countries, the men were more likely to be from countries where English is not the native language. 1929 women added location information: 1349 (70%) were from countries where English was the native language, and from 84 different countries. 129 men added location information: 73 (57%) were from countries where English was the native language, and from 37 different countries.

As detailed above, celebrity affiliations can act as a catalyst for people joining book clubs (Hartley, 2001). There is a correlation between the date Watson created OSS, and the number of people joining the website. All the profiles in the sample included the date when

users joined Goodreads: 415 users (17.5%) joined in January 2016, the month and year that Watson launched OSS and promoted it via social media.³⁷ This group of 415 users were younger (the average age was 25.3 years old) and included more men (91 or 22%) and users from countries where English was not the native language than the overall sample. The majority of these readers were under 30 (247 or 59.5%) and 43.6% (181 users) were 25 and under. Additionally, the majority of members from this group were from countries where English was not the native language: the members were from 54 different countries, six where English was the native language, and 46.3% (192 members) were from countries where English was the native language. The men in this grouping were particularly diverse: from 34 different countries (mostly from Europe [39 readers] and Asia [21 readers]); and 59 (65%) were from countries where English was not the native language. We cannot determine whether Watson’s affiliation to Goodreads encouraged *all* of these users to sign up. However, we can surmise that more younger readers – especially men and those whose native language was not English – than the overall sample of the group, joined Goodreads during this period.

Book List Analysis

In order to analyse the book selections a corpus of the OSS monthly/bi-monthly book titles was assembled and analysed. The corpus included author demographics,³⁸ publication details,³⁹ and Goodreads information.⁴⁰ Fifteen books, written by sixteen authors were chosen for OSS between January 2016 and December 2017 (table 2). Watson, ostensibly, decided on the book choices apart from the seventh book, which was chosen by the OSS group members in a poll conducted by Watson⁴¹. Each book was announced in a separate thread created by Watson – an analysis of these announcements will follow – and allowed group members to comment on these and on the separate sections dedicated to each book.

Book no.	Book	Author/s	First published	Original language	Original publisher	Wave of Feminism	Genre
1	My life on the road	Gloria Steinem	2015	English	Oneworld	Fourth	BM: Memoirs
2	The Color Purple	Alice Walker	1982	English	Harcourt Brace Jovanovich	Second	FA: Modern and contemporary fiction (post c. 1945)
3	All about love: new visions	bell hooks	2000	English	HarperCollins	Third	J: Society and social sciences
4	How to be a woman	Caitlin Moran	2011	English	Ebury Publishing/ Penguin RandomHouse	Fourth	BM: Memoirs
5	The	Maggie	2015	English	Graywolf	Fourth	BM: Memoirs

	Argonauts	Nelson			Press		
6	The Complete Persepolis	Marjane Satrapi	2003	French	L'Association	Third	BM: Memoirs
7	Hunger makes me a modern girl: a memoir	Carrie Brownstein	2015	English	Riverhead Books	Fourth	BM: Memoirs
8	Half the sky: turning oppression into opportunity for women worldwide	Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn	2009	English	Knopf	Fourth	J: Society and social sciences
9	Mom & me & mom	Maya Angelou	2013	English	Random House	Fourth	BM: Memoirs
10	The vagina monologues	Eve Ensler	1998	English	Random House	Third	DD: Plays, playscripts
11	Women Who Run With Wolves	Clarissa Pinkola Estes	1992	English	Ballantine Books	Third	J: Society and social sciences
12	The handmaid's tale	Margaret Atwood	1985	English	McClelland and Stewart	Second	FA: Modern and contemporary fiction (post c. 1945)
13	The Beauty Myth	Naomi Wolf	1990	English	Chatto & Windus	Third	J: Society and social sciences...
14	Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body	Roxane Gay	2017	English	HarperCollins	Fourth	BM: Memoirs
15	The Power	Naomi Alderman	2016	English	Viking/Penguin in Random House	Fourth	FA: Modern and contemporary fiction (post c. 1945)

Table 2: Complete list of the OSS reading list from January 2016-December 2017

In the announcement for the second book, Watson contends that she is, 'trying to choose works that cover as much ground as possible and are diverse' (Watson, 2016d). Although half of the authors on the book list are white, middle-class, cisgendered, and able-bodied, there is an attempt to include a more intersectional range of authors who challenge the normative, white and middle-class, feminist narrative:⁴² a quarter (four) openly identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, 44% (seven) are authors of colour, and 31% (five) are from working-class backgrounds.⁴³ The authors are predominantly women; however, a

heterosexual, married couple wrote one of the titles. Additionally, the book list has a strong Anglo-American focus (**Table 3**) and is dominated by titles that were originally published in the English-language (**Table 2**).

Book no.	Author	Nationality	Person of Colour	LGBTQIA+	Background: middle or working class
1	Gloria Steinem	American	N	N	M
2	Alice Walker	American	Y: African American	Y	W
3	bell hooks	American	Y: African American	N	W
4	Caitlin Moran	British	N	N	W
5	Maggie Nelson	American	N	Y	M
6	Marjane Satrapi	Iranian	Y: Middle Eastern/Iranian	N	M
7	Carrie Brownstein	American	N:	Y	M
8	Nicholas Kristof	American	N:	N	M
8	Sheryl WuDunn	American	Y: Chinese American	N	M
9	Maya Angelou	American	Y: African American	N	W
10	Eve Ensler	American	N	N	M
11	Clarissa Pinkola Estes	American	Y: Mestiza Latina	N	W
12	Margaret Atwood	Canadian	N	N	M
13	Naomi Wolf	American	N	N	M
14	Roxane Gay	American	Y: Haitian American	Y	M
15	Naomi Alderman	British	N	N	M

Table 3: OSS book list: author demographics

Several of the OSS books were written by what Anthea Taylor refers to as ‘blockbuster feminists’ (2016: 2), such as Gloria Steinem (Book 1) and Naomi Wolf (Book 13).⁴⁴ These popular, often bestselling, feminist books are mostly American, and are works that conform to traditional rhetorical structures and modes of access.⁴⁵ The list leans towards nonfiction titles – nearly three quarters (73%) fall into this category – but covers a variety of genres: memoirs⁴⁶ are the most popular, nearly half (47%) of the book list is comprised of this genre, followed by non-fiction books in the society and social sciences subject area (over a quarter or 27%), and contemporary fiction (20%).⁴⁷

The North American focus is unsurprising given that Americans are the most represented nationality in the sample with 832 users (35%) however, as we will see below, this can be problematic for non-native English speakers. Typically, traditional book clubs assume and encourage the participants to identify with the protagonists in the stories (Long, 2003; Ivy 2011; Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2013). Ivy (2011) notes that books are often marketed to book clubs with this in mind. While this can be constructive because it allows

readers to contemplate their ‘relationship to the contemporary historical movement and the social conditions that characterise it,’ it can also be problematic if the readers fail to fully engage with the issues presented in a book if they lack the cultural understanding needed to analyse them (Long, 2003: 22).⁴⁸ The OSS sample is an international one with participants from 91 countries, so having such a Western, English-language focus does not reflect the diversity of perspectives in the group. Incidentally, the best-rated books on the list are by authors of colour (table 4).⁴⁹ This underscores the disconnection between the OSS (and Goodreads) community and the books that are recommended to them.

Book no	Book	Author/s	Goodreads rating	No. of ratings	No. of reviews
1	My life on the road	Gloria Steinem	4.08	18,601	2,625
2	The color purple	Alice Walker	4.17	405,330	9,773
3	All about love: new visions	bell hooks	3.95	7,215	841
4	How to be a woman	Caitlin Moran	3.73	80,720	7,514
5	The argonauts	Maggie Nelson	4	14,285	1,643
6	The Complete Persepolis	Marjane Satrapi	4.36	79,740	5,526
7	Hunger makes me a modern girl : a memoir	Carrie Brownstein	3.88	19,364	2,107
8	Half the sky : turning oppression into opportunity for women worldwide	Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn	4.31	41,310	4,691
9	Mom & me & mom	Maya Angelou	4.14	12,020	1,461
10	The vagina monologues	Eve Ensler	3.86	21,814	1,490
11	Women Who Run With Wolves	Clarissa Pinkola Estes	4.15	25,110	1,791
12	The handmaid's tale	Margaret Atwood	4.07	731,985	39,350
13	The Beauty Myth	Naomi Wolf	3.89	14,829	853
14	Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body	Roxane Gay	4.32	17,307	2,738
15	The Power	Naomi Alderman	3.93	14,021	1,910

Table 4: Goodreads ratings of the OSS book list

Identity, Learning, Fandom, and Community: an analysis of the introductory comments thread

To help understand the motivations for joining OSS, and to gain a better understanding of the OSS membership, an analysis of the ‘Introductions’ thread was undertaken: this thread

had 1774 posts, as of 31st October 2017, with 1527 people providing introductions in English.⁵⁰ Many of the posts were lengthy and deeply personal, and most users provided details about themselves and why they joined the group, as instructed by the person who started the thread.⁵¹ Open coding was used when analysing the comments and four main themes emerged: learning, connection, fandom, and identity.

The majority of the comments were positive, conveying enthusiasm and excitement for OSS. However, there were ten comments that were either negative or completely unrelated to the book club: these comments are all by men.⁵² For example, one man criticized both feminism and the book club, calling for people to be humanists, while another asked if someone could put him in touch with Watson. This type of trolling is common in online discussions: feminist groups are particularly susceptible (Herring et al, 2002). Women were also critical of feminism, or were unsure about identifying as feminists, as we can see below. Engaging in social media can be a performative act: users can construct an identity whilst engaging with social issues (in the case of this research, feminism/gender equality) (Cover, 2012). Reading can be a source of identity formation, so members of OSS are (explicitly or implicitly), by being part of the group, identifying themselves as someone who is interested in reading feminist books (Radway, 1988, 1991; Flint, 2006). However, less than a quarter (317 members: 21% of those providing an introduction) of people explicitly identified themselves as feminists.⁵³ In fact, eight users explicitly stated they were not feminists, and seven said they were equalists or humanists rather than feminists. Five women said they were not comfortable with identifying as feminist because they did not understand enough about feminism. One woman was critical about modern feminism, particularly second-wave feminism, saying it was not intersectional enough. What did unite the readers was a love of reading and books,⁵⁴ an interest in gender equality, and the desire to learn more about the subject matter (see below). There were a number of users who highlighted their own experience as part of their introduction. Just under a fifth (291 users or 19%) included information about their current or previous, undergraduate and/or postgraduate degrees as part of their introduction. Forty-five (2.9%) people stated that they had engaged with feminist theory at higher education level.⁵⁵ Several users described themselves as experts with two users, both academics, discussing the feminist books that they had written and/or the anthologies to which they had contributed. One user said that they met Watson whilst they were both studying at Oxford University.

The most popular reason users gave as to why they joined OSS was because they wanted to learn more about feminism (534 or 35%). Access to information has traditionally been a common reason for people joining online communities (Furlong, 1989; Rheingold, 1993; Jones, 1995; Wellman & Gulia, 1996). As detailed above, while users expressed an interest in gender equality, the majority did not explicitly identify as feminists. Therefore, users were keen to develop their understanding of feminism through their engagement with the books, authors, and the OSS community. Even longstanding feminists expressed a desire to understand the current conversations. As the demographics of the overall sample show,

OSS is an intergenerational group. In the introductions, 14 (self-declared) feminists, over 50 years of age, vocalised their interest in connecting with, learning from, and supporting younger feminists. Three of these users said they felt energised by the enthusiasm of the younger users. Other members disclosed their intent to pass on their learning to other (particularly younger) people. Forty-three users (2.8%) said that they worked, or had close contact, with young people and wanted to share the knowledge they acquired from the group.⁵⁶ Parents, in particular, were keen to teach their children about feminism.

The second most popular reason to join was the influence of celebrity, which we saw from the number of users joining Goodreads in January 2016. 515 (33.7%) users said one of the reasons they joined OSS was because they were a fan of, or they admired, Watson (either through her acting or from her work with the UN/HeForShe project). 110 (7.2%) users made positive comments about the *Harry Potter* series or Hermione Granger, and many stated that the series was the first book/s they read. Although the early *Harry Potter* books are classed as middle grade, usually for readers aged nine to 12, the series has a universal appeal. If we assume that the typical age of readers of the first book, originally published in 1997, was nine, then these readers would currently be 29. This fits in with the demographic of the OSS sample, where the average age was 28.6 years old: the majority of the OSS sample fell into the millennial category.⁵⁷ Wen and Cui (2014) identified an indirect association between celebrity involvement in political and social issues, and civic engagement by young people. Young people often try to emulate the behaviour of their celebrity idols; therefore, Watson's popularity could, potentially, have a positive influence in encouraging young people to join the feminist movement (Austin et al., 2008). However, as already noted, the version of feminism promoted within OSS is not particularly intersectional.

The third main reason people joined was to be part of a like-minded community. 360 (23.6%) users said they joined to connect with others who are interested in feminism, particularly if they felt isolated in the community where they live, or had felt their opinions had been attacked in the past. Couldry (2012) examines how social media practices contribute to our understanding of relationships with each other and wider society: concepts such as networks and connections are important. Users also, as detailed earlier, can form their identities from membership in a self-inclusive group: this can extend to online communities (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Building friendships and personal relationships with like-minded people across the world, has also, traditionally, been an impetus for people joining online communities (Rheingold, 1993; Horrigan et al., 2001). However, users from countries where English is not the dominant language highlighted some of the issues of being part of an Anglo-American centric community.⁵⁸ These issues included: books not being available, or being expensive, in different countries (particularly in the Global South); no translations of the books being available; appeals for comments in the forum to be translated into a variety of languages, and the hope that feminism would be looked at from different (non-Western) perspectives. Several group members volunteered to translate comments for other members or announced they were part of the OSS translation team.

Additionally, most of the introductions were written in English, irrespective of the reader's mother tongue, which led to 39 members either apologising for their, or expressing the difficulties of communicating in, English.

Emma Watson's announcements: reading practices, hierarchy, personal reflections on the books, political content and publication details

Like traditional book club members, feminist celebrities are often characterized by their (white, class, cisgender, sexual-orientation, able-bodied) privilege – e.g. Watson, Taylor Swift, Lena Dunham⁵⁹ – and this has garnered criticism from intersectional feminists (hooks, 1994; Gay, 2014; Taylor, 2016). The type of feminism that such feminist celebrities promote is often individualistic and can exclude marginalized groups. Watson has been heralded as the 'fresh face of feminism' (Candy, 2015) but she has also been critiqued for her privilege. Professor Diane Negra said of Watson, 'She's a very useful figure for feminism, because she attracts people who might not be drawn to it in another form... But she is a particularly palatable version of a feminist celebrity. She is a very glamorous and polished figure with all the markers of privilege. She is clearly not an activist of the old school' (Barber, 2017). Meanwhile, as illustrated in the analysis above, OSS can be considered as a group that can encourage a new generation and a more diverse group of readers to engage with feminist writing. As such, we could consider Watson to be putting her 'celebrity capital to what could be broadly considered "feminist" uses' (Taylor, 2016: 2). In these respects, Watson has all three characteristics of Ohanian's model for celebrity credibility: expertise, trustworthiness, and physical attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990). However, Watson has many privileges, noted above, that inform her feminism.⁶⁰

Several studies have explored how the book selection for offline reading clubs and spaces can be informed by and/or generate hierarchies and 'informal processes of social control' (Boyarin, 1993: 204; Long, 1986; Hartley, 2001; Allington, 2011). While such studies looked at offline spaces and at power relationships that may emerge over time, OSS is a forum where an established authority figure is already in place leading the book club. Authority figures can inform and steer interpretations and receptions of particular books (Allington, 2011): something that can be found in the OSS group. Watson fits into what Rehberg Sedo describes as the *trusted other*, which is a term normally ascribed to friends and family, but which can also be assigned to other cultural tastemakers whose recommendations have proven satisfactory to the readers (Rehberg Sedo, 2004, 2008). Watson creates cultural taste hierarchies through her book choices: the OSS members and the social structures within the book club reinforce these hierarchies (Rehberg Sedo, 2008: 188).

For this case study, the book announcements by Watson to her OSS audience were analysed in order to understand Watson's role in the book club.⁶¹ Each announcement was open-coded and six key themes emerged: reading practices, personal opinions (political and literary), intersectionality, guiding questions, content and publication details.⁶² From the

announcements, it is unclear whether Watson actually chose *all* the books on the list herself, or if she had read *all* the books in advance.⁶³ As discussed earlier, most of the book choices are ostensibly by Watson, except for the seventh book which was chosen by the OSS community. The responsibility for the fifteenth book choice is also ambiguous: it is not explicit within the discourse and the valediction includes ‘Emma and the Our Shared Shelf team’ rather than Watson as an individual, like the other announcements. The announcements are a mix of tones and writing styles. The first three announcements are informal, seem to be written by Watson, and we get a sense of Watson as a reader from them. Watson also uses singular pronouns more frequently in these announcements, which suggest that it is her writing them rather than one of the other moderators. In particular, the first announcement seems the least contrived out of the messages: it conveys Watson’s excitement about the group and gives an insight into some of her reading practices.

Who has their copy? Just put my name, where I bought the book and the date in the front of mine! I am so excited! I'm reading it with a pen in hand so I can do some underlining and margin writing. Time to make a cup of peppermint tea! It's only two weeks until the last week of this month (e.g. discussion time)... Got to get reading! (Announcement 1: ‘First Book!! My Life on the Road, by Gloria Steinem (2016)’ (Watson, 2016e)

The second announcement is also informal, and Watson transmits to the readers that she is in the same position as them by saying, ‘I am learning and reading for the first time with you’ (Watson, 2016d). This is a suggestion that the book club is non-hierarchical. Watson makes several statements like this (table 5) but also indicates proprietary over the group through the use of possessive pronouns e.g. ‘I'm really proud of *my* club members’ (Book 5). Watson also uses first person subjective and objective pronouns (i.e. ‘I’ and ‘me’) more frequently than plural pronouns.⁶⁴ The announcements, for the most part, get longer and more formal after this: they seem to be written from a PR perspective – often reading like a blurb – and with the implication that Watson has read the book because she conveys her thoughts on the book and asks a variety of questions to start the discussions. This could be because Watson feels a sense of responsibility for the group, which she imparts in the announcement for Book 5: ‘I've been searching high and low for our next book. The club has been much more international than I had anticipated - and much bigger’.

We learn about Watson’s reading and book choosing practices through the first four announcement comments. This creates a familiar environment and helps the audience (i.e. the OSS group members) to identify with Watson. Despite this, there is a clear hierarchy between Watson and her audience. For example, Watson shows her elevated position when she chose the third book, ‘in honor of bell hooks who interviewed me for Paper magazine this month’⁶⁵ (Book 3), or when she talks about ‘my *Esquire* guest edit this month’ (Book 4). In fact, Watson has access to several of the authors on the book-list, and she interviewed them for OSS as part of the on-going discussions.⁶⁶ Additionally, she expresses her authority

when she suggests Caitlin Moran as an author ‘I think you need to know,’ despite the book having the lowest rating on Goodreads (see **Table 4**).⁶⁷ Watson also uses exaggerated, ableist language in this introduction, which is incongruous with the supposed inclusiveness of OSS: ‘thought I was losing my mind’ (Book 4). This is another example where Watson’s privilege is apparent. The subsequent announcements are less personal and concentrate on the content and publication details of each book, rather than Watson’s experiences of reading them.

The main way that Watson asserts her authority is by assuming the role of the book-club leader. Watson’s announcements become increasingly detailed as the OSS unfolds and she discloses the contents of the book and her personal reflections. Since these comments are made at the start of the discussion, instead of after the members get a chance to read the books, they have the potential to influence the OSS members’ interpretations. While Watson does provide some guiding questions, she also uses influential language – including literary criticism – that could sway the conversations. Watson does imply that she will participate in the discussions, e.g. she articulates a variation of ‘I can’t wait to hear your thoughts!’ for books 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, and 15. Watson, however, only posts in the ‘Announcements’ section rather than engaging in further conversations in the variety of other threads.⁶⁸ The replies to the announcements are usually positive, with no criticism of

Theme	“Quote”/ (book number)
Reading practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Just put my name, where I bought the book and the date in the front of mine!” (Book 1) ● “I’m reading it with a pen in hand so I can do some underlining and margin writing.” (Book 1) ● “Time to make a cup of peppermint tea!” (Book 1) ● “I’ve heard amazing things about this book from a person that I trust...” (Book 2) ● “I read it on a plane from London to New York and I laughed out loud and cried so much I think the whole of my cabin, airline staff included, thought I was losing my mind.” (Book 4)
Guiding questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Has the world moved on in twenty years, or are there still aspects of women’s sexuality we can’t talk about, through our own fears or because others try to stop us? Do we think art can change the world?” (Book 10) ● “How does one reconnect with our deepest, most true selves when today’s world demands us to conform to ridiculous expectations?” (Book 11) ● “Could any of Atwood’s speculations take place again, or are some of them taking place already? Are the women in the book powerless in their oppression or could they be doing more to fight it?” (Book 12) ● “We put such high expectations on ourselves as feminists, on other feminists, and the movement as a whole. It feels like such a relief to take ownership of words like “nasty woman” and “bad feminist”. They don’t have so much power this way and maybe they remind us not to hold ourselves and others to unreasonably high standards - we are all human after all and at different moments of our learning journeys.” (Book 14)
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “lighthearted” (Book 4)

<p>opinion (Literary)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “It is so brilliant though. It deserves to be read more than once.” (Book 4) ● “about inclusion and the powers and shortfalls of language” (Book 5) ● “The Argonauts rewards us with an expansive way of considering identity, caretaking, and freedom – along with a liberation from, what Maggie calls, ‘the demand that anyone live a life that’s all one thing’.” (Book 5) ● “It might require a bit of work” (book 5) ● “And we get a very real sense of what it was like to be a woman in Iran during this intense time of cultural and political transition.” (Book 5) ● “We’re swept up in” (Book 5) ● “Satrapi’s deceptively simple, almost whimsical drawings belie the seriousness and rich complexity of her story--but it’s also very funny too.” (Book 6) ● “She points to storytelling, our ancient narratives, as a way for women to reconnect to the Wild Woman all women have within themselves, but have lost.” (Book 11) ● “Estes retells ancient myths and fairy tales from around the world and in doing so shines a light on a path which leads us back to our natural state --- and help us restore the power we carry within us.” (Book 11) ● “is a gripping read, but it won’t make you feel comfortable.” (Book 12) ● “What struck me the most about the book is Roxane’s searing honesty.” (Book 14) ● “It traverses many of the issues surrounding our human bodies, the sexual experiences we have, our relationship with food, how we feel about our own bodies and the difference gender has to play on a body” (Book 14) ● “This is a really clever literary device which highlights how absurd rigid gender roles are.” (Book 15) ● “Alderman challenges the cliché that women are more noble than men, and that a world run by women would be more gentle, with benevolent leaders and no war.” (Book 15)
<p>Personal opinion (Political)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “As Iran enters another important period of change, with relations re-opening with much of the world, I think this is a particularly good time to pick up Persepolis.” (Book 6) ● “I’ve chosen a book that tackles inequality and women’s rights head-on” (Book 7) ● “I’m very excited about spending the months of January and February reading and discussing a book/play that has literally changed lives.” (Book 10) ● “Just say the title The Vagina Monologues and, even now, twenty years after Eve Ensler first performed her ground-breaking show, the words feel radical.” (Book 10) ● “But both wolves and women have suffered a similar fate of being hounded, harassed, exhausted, marginalized, accused of being devious and of little value.” (Book 11) ● “Well, here’s our chance to read beyond the ‘tag’, and share our thoughts about how we think its dystopian vision relates to the world of 2017.” (Book 12) ● “We put such high expectations on ourselves as feminists, on other feminists, and the movement as a whole. It feels like such a relief to take ownership of words like “nasty woman” and “bad feminist”. They don’t have so much power this way and maybe they remind us not to hold ourselves and others to unreasonably high standards - we are all human after all and at different moments of our learning journeys.” (Book 14)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “This made me think about the fact that history was written by those who held the power” (Book 15) • “It also made me think about how the distribution of power and gender roles throughout history often seems arbitrary, and how they could have perhaps ended up very differently.” (Book 15)
Group dynamics and hierarchy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I am learning and reading for the first time with you.” (book 1) • “I am excited to read this book with you.” (Book 5) • “Hope I did you proud,” (Book 5) • “Thank you for voting and I’m really looking forward to reading this one with you all.” (Book 7) • “I’m so interested to see which monologues we all like best, and which ones still shock us.” (Book 10) • “Either way, she is an English hero of mine who I think you need to know.” (Book 4) • “Maybe you read Caitlin’s article in my Esquire guest edit this month...” (Book 4) • “I’m really proud of my club members” (Book 5) • “I’m excited to hear what you think.” (Book 6) • “I’m really looking forward to reading this one with you all.” (Book 7) • “I can’t wait to hear your thoughts!” (Book 9) • “I can’t wait to hear your thoughts!” (Book 12) • “I’m excited to hear what you all make of the novel.” (Book 15)
Intersectionality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I am trying to choose works that cover as much ground as possible and are diverse...” (Book 2) • “On a side note, this book also appears to have been translated into lots of languages and should be reasonably easy to get hold of.” (Book 4) • “I’m having to find books that are accessible, cover multiple perspectives and languages, that are unique and not too well known already.” (Book 5) • “The club has been much more international than I had anticipated - and much bigger.” (Book 5) • “fluidly gendered.” (Book 5) • “Maybe it will change the way we think and speak about others and ourselves?” (Book 5)
Detailed content information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watson provides details of the contents of the books in books: 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, and 15. • E.g. “Vivian Baxter cuts a fiercely unapologetic figure, imperfect but admirable, and we discover not just how she had a hand in Angelou’s evolution as a black woman but also in her feminist perspective, her independence and self-awareness, all of which contributed to her unique way of looking at the world and the way she expressed herself on the page. As a result, this is perhaps the greatest window into what shaped Angelou as a writer and poet and a fitting end to a lifetime of amazing works.” (Book 9)
Publication details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watson provided publication details, including publication history in some cases, for the following books: 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15 • E.g. Watson provides a link, to Amazon, to buy books 3 and 4

Table 5: Coding of Watson’s book announcements

Watson or the information she has provided. According to Rojek, celebrity can be elevated by ‘the expert intervention of cultural intermediaries’ (2013: 458): OSS does this for

Watson's strand of feminism. Audiences, in the case of this study's book club participants, support and extend Watson's role as a cultural tastemaker by engaging in a 'public dialogue' with, and about, her (Taylor, 2016: 20).

Conclusion

The OSS community has grown to become the largest group on Goodreads since its inception in January 2016. The group has an international, intergenerational membership but is particularly influential in attracting a younger generation of readers. Although OSS introduces feminism to a wider audience, there is a risk that cultural hegemony can be endorsed and extended through Watson's role as leader, and her particular type of celebrity feminism. Moreover, while the Goodreads community, particularly the OSS group, may seem like a global village, power relationships are still in existence through the dominance of the English language within the threads, and via the focus of the book selections on Anglo-American culture. Although there are clear thoughts articulated by Watson about how to diversify the monthly/bi-monthly book choices, there is a preference towards English-language books written by cisgendered, middle-class, able-bodied, white women. Therefore, the reading list does not represent the international and intersectional nature of the group membership – something several group members voiced their concern about. There is, therefore, the potential to include books by authors that can give different perspectives of feminism that are more inclusive for OSS members.

Watson begins OSS as one of the group; however, later she assumes the position as book club leader as OSS grows in size. While Watson provides some direction for discussion – such as guiding questions for the later books – her interventions can also influence the discussions and the interpretations of the book. In this instance, Watson's discourse reflects her power as an authority figure because Watson's contribution to the discussion defines the language being used by the group to engage with and represent the topic. Watson is already in an elevated position as a result of her celebrity status, and her opinion may be ranked above that of others. Many users joined the group because they were fans of Watson's, often since they were children, so they place confidence in her opinions (on the books and on feminism). This can be exclusionary if the feminism being promoted is not intersectional. To some extent, OSS endorses the individualist feminist narrative over a collective or pluralist understanding of feminism. This focus on an individualist type of narrative is a product of the dominance of memoirs on the book list, most of which are written by white women, and of the hierarchy of authority established by Watson in her book introductions, where 'I' dominates over the use of 'we'. In these ways, then, OSS replicates and upholds patterns of dominance and exclusion: it does not function as an egalitarian space, and this reality prevents OSS's strand of feminism from being truly intersectional.

Fourth-wave feminism, as promoted by marketplace feminist celebrities like Watson, is particularly digital-media-friendly and, as such, influences popular culture and cultural output. However, normative whiteness has been central to celebrity feminists and feminist

celebrities: this type of marketplace feminism can extend this narrative, instead of making feminism more inclusive. The book publishing industry has already faced criticisms in recent years about its monoculture and lack of representative books and authors (Tivnan and Wood, 2013; Shaffi, 2015; Kean, 2015, Hynes, 2017, Ramdarshan Bold, 2018). If the OSS book-list is anything to go by, this extends to feminist writing. A third of the authors, published within the fourth-wave time period, were of colour, and a third openly identified at LGBTQIA+: this is fewer than the overall book sample chosen by Watson in the first two years of OSS. Taylor argues that the publication and promotion of these *celebrity blockbusters* ensure that 'some feminisms come to receive cultural legitimacy over others': Watson's celebrity book club, and the book choices she makes, augments and perpetuates these cultural hierarchies (2016: 197). While 'everyone' may be 'welcome' to join OSS, the type of feminism promoted there might not be welcome to everyone.

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Notes:

¹ Emma Watson will be referred to as Watson for the rest of the article.

² Many scholars have criticized the portrayal of feminism in contemporary mainstream media (Taylor, 2008, 2016, Dean 2010; Mendes 2011, 2015). However, marketplace feminism, a term coined by Zeisler (2016), (also known as capitalist feminism or neoliberal feminism) – i.e. where companies and individuals use feminism to sell products or promote their own brand. In addition, feminist journalism has been on the rise in recent years so feminism has become a mainstream topic (Groetzinger, 2016, Vagionos & Jeltsen, 2016). There has also been a rise in artistic and cultural works inspired, or influenced, by feminism (Vincent, 2014).

³ Watson's followers were encouraged to help name the club. See Watson, Emma (EmmaWatson). "I've decided to go with 'Our Shared Shelf'. @emilyfabb - I absolutely loved this. Thank you, thank you x". 07 Jan 2016, 13:26 UTC. Tweet.

⁴ At the time of beginning this project, there were 206,384 members (31st October 2017). By 11th March 2019 there were nearly 223,892 members.

⁵ For studies on gender, age, and social class see: Long 1986, 2003; Radway, 1988, 1991, 1997; Hartley, 2002; Murray, 2002; Barstow, 2003; Poole, 2003; Rehberg Sedo, 2003, 2004; and Womey, 2007. For ethnicity see: McHenry, 2002; and Davies, 2008. For multi-media book clubs see: Scharber, 2009; Swann & Allington, 2009; Ivy, 2011; and Rehberg Sedo, 2011. All of these studies span different time periods and geographies.

⁶ Other studies have looked at the power relationships among book club participants (see, for example, Peplow, 2011; Whiteley, 2011); however, these relationships will not be explored in this chapter.

⁷ Interpretive literary communities or societies, the precursor to book clubs, where members read and discussed popular and classic books amongst other literary activities, grew in popularity in the

late nineteenth century (Murray, 2002; Knott, 2015). These communities were particularly popular amongst white, middle-class women who saw their involvement not only as social but also as educational (Knott, 2015).

⁸ The Richard and Judy Book Club, like Oprah's, began as a (British) television book club, which had a significant impact on British book buying/sales (McCrum, 2006). It extended online in 2010.

⁹ Watson set up an Instagram account for OSS: this reposts photos by group members. The account has over 201,000 followers. Watson also shares bookish photos on her own Instagram, which has over 4,060,000 followers. These include photos of her leaving feminist books in public places for people to find (BBC, 2017).

¹⁰ Sales for *My Life on the Road* increased by 109% in volume in the week after Watson's announcement. Oneworld, the British publisher of the book, actually ran out of stock that same week and had to reprint 3000 copies of the book in the first instance (Cowdrey, 2016).

¹¹ Celebrity feminism: scholars, activists, writers etc. that are famous *because of* their feminism and the public performance of their feminism e.g. Gloria Steinem (Wicke, 1994). Taylor refers to Steinem as an 'enduring celebrity feminist' and cites her appearance on the popular television series *The Good Wife* as evidence of her mainstream fame (Taylor, 2016; 19). Taylor also refers to celebrity feminist authors, such as Steinem, as 'blockbuster feminists' due to the global and mainstream appeal of their books (Taylor, 2016, p.2).

¹² It is important to note that journalist Jeetendr Sehdev undertook this study and that the results were reported in *The Independent* newspaper. Sehdev's data, methodology, and critical analysis are not available anywhere.

¹³ Many scholars have questioned the relationship between postfeminism and fourth-wave feminism (Genz and Brabon, 2009; Retallack, Ringrose, and Lawrence, 2016; Gill, 2016). This article will not discuss and debate these terms.

¹⁴ Many of the feminist celebrities are white, middle-class women e.g. Watson, Lena Dunham, Taylor Swift. This issue will be explored further in this article.

¹⁵ Watson is what Rojek (2001) described as an *achieved* celebrity: someone who has achieved the status of fame through a perceived skill. This type of fame is most valued in society (Rojek, 2001). Watson is famous for her acting, often as bookish characters such as Hermione Granger (Harry Potter) and Belle (Beauty and the Beast), in addition to her UN role. While there have been criticisms about feminist celebrities, Watson did not feature in the 'least credible' feminist celebrity list generated from the survey (Hosie, 2016).

¹⁶ Kim Kardashian West is an *attained* celebrity: someone who has achieved fame through mass media attention (Rojek, 2001). Marsden (2018) notes that Kardashian West's fame through *low-brow* culture – reality television and social media – calls her legitimacy as a literary tastemaker into question.

¹⁷ Jennifer Baumgardner (2011) identifies 2008 as the start of fourth-wave feminism. Although simplifying feminism into waves is problematic – and, as Nicholson (2010) contends, 'the wave metaphor has outlived its usefulness' – scholars and commentators continue to segment feminism movements in this way. Consequently, this article refers to the different waves of feminism as a marker for periods of time rather than using them to portray singular, uniform movements (McRobbie, 2009).

¹⁸ Including authors such as Paulo Coelho, Neil Gaiman, Roxane Gay, and Stephen King.

¹⁹ For example, 9,554 groups are tagged with ‘bookclub’ and 2,187 are tagged with ‘book-club’, and 750 are tagged with ‘bookclub-any-type-of-book’.

²⁰ The original Oprah’s Book Club first rose to prominence on television. The new iteration – Oprah’s Book Club 2.0 – is available across a variety of digital and social platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter etc.), which could account for fewer (particularly younger) participants on the Goodreads group.

²¹ The moderators are comprised of nine women, including Watson, and one man.

²² The moderators of the OSS group were informed of this research and their advice was sought on how to use the data ethically. Issues such as privacy and informed consent were considered and, as such, direct quotes by OSS group members, apart from founder Emma Watson (a public figure), have not been included in this study. However, data about group members has been aggregated and anonymised and included in the analysis.

²³ Watson addressed her brand of feminism in January 2018, two years after she started the book club, and one month after the end of the data collection. After reading Reni Eddo-Lodge’s *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, Watson acknowledged her privileges and considered, “What are the ways I have benefited from being white?” (Watson, 2018). The OSS book choices have become more ethnically inclusive since Watson’s epiphany.

²⁴ Demographic information includes: age, gender, and location. Profile information can also include: books read and to-read, book reviews, group memberships, and friend lists etc. The latter will not be analysed in this article.

²⁵ Age, gender, and location.

²⁶ There is no way to verify whether the demographic information, provided on the profile pages, is authentic.

²⁷ Thelwall and Kousha’s (2017) methodology, which looked at how Goodreads members used the site, helped inform this study. The demographic information was downloaded from:

<https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/179584-our-shared-shelf.xml?key=SEcjXJ9c0vKBpFwVjTDo6A> in October 2017.

²⁸ Thirty people did not add gender, 532 people did not add age, and 158 people did not add geographic location.

²⁹ The date the user joined Goodreads was still publicly available.

³⁰ Book clubs in the twenty-first century are associated with women readers; however, there were very few women, or mixed-sex, groups during the literary society resurgence (Murray, 2002).

³¹ Fifty-eight (2.4%) users did not add ‘gender’ information to their accounts or it was not publicly available.

³² 1814 (76.4% of the sample) profiles included age.

³³ The remaining numbers/percentages include members whose demographic (age, ‘gender’, and/or nationality) information was not available.

³⁴ The countries with the most readers were: the USA (832: 35%), the UK (220: 9.3%), Canada (108: 4.6%), Germany (93: 3.9%), Australia (79: 3.3%), France (65: 2.7%), Italy (61: 2.6%), Spain (61: 2.6%), India (56: 2.6%), and Brazil (49: 2.1%). All of the other countries had 38 readers and fewer. Eighteen countries had only one reader.

³⁵ The UK government classifies the following overseas countries as majority native-English-speaking: Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Canada, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Ireland, Jamaica, New Zealand, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom, and United States of America.

³⁶ Based on users that added location information.

³⁷ This was the most popular month/year for OSS members, in the sample, to join Goodreads. Most users joined in 2016.

³⁸ i.e. gender-identity, ethnicity, nationality, class, and sexuality where available/self-identified.

³⁹ i.e. publisher, date published, language, and genre information

⁴⁰ i.e. ratings and reviews.

⁴¹ The book received 755 votes (9.1% of the vote) and was closely followed by *Mom & Me & Mom*/Maya Angelou (667 votes or 8.1%), *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*/Judy Blume (620 votes or 7.5%) and *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*/Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn (584 votes or 7.1%): *Mom & Me & Mom* and *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* went on to become the 9th and 8th books on the list.

⁴² All of the authors were cisgendered and did not identify as having a physical disability. Books written in English by white, middle-class, cisgendered, and able-bodied women make up 44% of the list.

⁴³ It can be noted that 80% of the authors from working class backgrounds were also authors of colour e.g. authors such as Maya Angelou and Alice Walker write about growing up in poverty.

⁴⁴ Taylor (2016) uses the term 'blockbuster feminist' to describe the celebrity feminists that publish very popular feminist books. This is based on Rowlands and Henderson's (1996) work.

⁴⁵ At this juncture, we can note that global publishing conglomerates published two-thirds of the books on the list.

⁴⁶ Four (57%) of the memoirs are written by white cis-women, four (57%) are written by heterosexual women, and five (71%) are written by middle-class woman: this shows that white, middle-class, cisgendered, and heterosexual personal experiences dominate these narratives.

⁴⁷ The remaining book is a play.

⁴⁸ For example, Long (2003) and Barstow (2003) both identified how white book club members failed to confront issues of 'race' and racism in books such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*.

⁴⁹ This includes Book 8, the third best-rated book, which has two authors, one of which is a third generation, Chinese-American.

⁵⁰ This thread was started by an OSS member and is situated in the 'Miscellaneous' section.

⁵¹ Users could give one or more reasons.

⁵² One man – a self-confessed MGTOW (Men Going Their Own Way) – went as far as saying that he believed feminism poisoned society and so joined OSS to learn more about it. MGTOW is a movement where 'the modern man preserves and protects his own sovereignty above all else' (MGTOW, 2017).

⁵³ Usually as some variation of 'I am a Feminist', with the word feminist often preceded by adjectives such as 'ardent', 'intersectional', and 'closet'.

⁵⁴ 412 users (27%) explicitly stated this in their introductory comments.

⁵⁵ In a module or as an entire undergraduate or postgraduate degree.

⁵⁶ This included: 25 parents, nine teachers, five librarians, three youth workers, and one aunt.

⁵⁷ Millennials are those born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s/early 2000s (Howe & Strauss, 2000, PWC, 2013). For this study, we consider Millennials (Generation Y) and Generation Z as young people.

⁵⁸ This reflects Long's (2003) observation of 19th Century reading groups where reading lists were influenced by the cultural geography of that time. For example, in OSS, one of the comments in the introductions from a reader based in Austria explicitly states that they hope the reading list would be broader than Anglo-American authors.

⁵⁹ Dunham, in particular, has faced criticism about her individualistic, white-focused, and neo-liberalist approach to feminism (Penny, 2012; Day, 2017).

⁶⁰ Watson responded to a question asking if she was a 'white feminist' – i.e. a feminist who concentrates on the experiences of white women – by saying, 'White feminism implies an exclusion of black women from the movement which I find surprising because my bosses (and the people who gave me the job) are two black women': a response that many found unsatisfactory. See: Watson, Emma (EmmaWatson). " @emeraldsgrreen I want as many people as possible to feel seen, heard and included in this movement. <http://t.co/QHogOfIPYn>". 09 Oct 2015, 17:42 UTC. Tweet

⁶¹ There were fifteen book announcements in total, corresponding to each book on the list, within the 'Announcements' section of the forum. This section has 59 topics in total – all started by Watson or one of the other OSS moderators – and 16,863 comments.

⁶² Scholars such as Fuchs (2014) have looked at how social media platforms are financially profiting from their users' activities. Since Goodreads is now owned by Amazon, it is interesting to see Watson suggesting that users buy the book from their website.

⁶³ Watson explicitly says she has read three of the books, implies – by the depth of description and analysis given in the introduction – that she has read five of the books, and explicitly says she has not read two of the books, and implies she has not read a further four.

⁶⁴ Watson uses 'I', 'me', 'mine', or 'myself' 56 times, and 'we', 'our', 'us', and 'ourselves', 39 times.

⁶⁵ Despite being British, Watson uses the American spelling of honour here.

⁶⁶ For example, Watson interviewed Gloria Steinem about her book (the first on the list) a month after it was announced.

⁶⁷ Moran, another white postfeminist, has also been criticized about her dismissal of the experiences and concerns of women of colour (Penny, 2012; Adewunmi, 2012). Watson is supporting Moran's strand of feminism through her endorsement of the book, and hailing Moran as a 'hero' of hers.

⁶⁸ Watson did interact in three, non-official, threads (one comment in each thread) in January 2016 but has not posted outside of official announcements since then. In two of the threads Watson specifically talked about the importance of intersectionality – namely, 'Black feminism' and 'Trans and disabled women' – and the need to diversify the OSS reading lists. Watson replied that she agreed and was "Definitely taking this into account" (Watson, 2016f). While the OSS reading list does include three books by 'black' authors and one book about the author's marriage to a gender-fluid person, it still conforms to normative narratives about feminism.