

“With and Between You All”: Celebrity Status, User-Audience Networks, and Representative
Claims in Emma Watson’s Feminist Politics

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As part of my work with UN Women, I have started reading as many books and essays about equality as I can get my hands on... I decided to start a Feminist book club, as I want to share what I'm learning and hear your thoughts too.

—Emma Watson (*Our Shared Shelf*, 2016)

In September 2014, Hollywood actor Emma Watson stood in front of the UN General Assembly to invite citizens to “step forward” and “speak up” against gender inequality by supporting the UN Women HeForShe campaign (UN Women, 2014). Her speech attracted attention from news and entertainment media around the world and the HeForShe conference was watched online more than 11 million times (HeForShe, 2015). The scale of the attention across digital platforms led Twitter to paint the hashtag #HeForShe on a wall at its headquarters (Nichols, 2014). Watson’s public persona had long been intertwined with Hermione Granger, the studious and steadfast character in the 2001–2011 *Harry Potter* film series—the second highest grossing entertainment franchise of all time (Forbes, 2017). The social media followings Watson had accumulated also meant she was well-placed to deliver the reach that the UN Women organization had hoped for (BBC Newsbeat, 2014). On her Instagram account, for example, Watson’s work representing UN Women and meeting world leaders sits alongside posts promoting her films and modeling high fashion.

Closer scrutiny of Watson’s social media posts soon reveals that she has gone beyond a conventional UN role in her efforts to promote feminist causes. In January 2016 Watson launched *Our Shared Shelf* (OSS), a feminist book group and discussion forum hosted on the Goodreads platform. On reaching the milestone of 100,000 members within a month, Watson

(2016d) thanked the book group for members’ “heart warming” contributions and promised to “keep going out there... to make this the best it can be.”

The connections provided by Watson’s celebrity capital enabled her to contribute to the OSS book club in ways that most of its members would find impossible. As we show in this chapter, Watson not only promoted the group across digital platforms, but also attracted broader media coverage to it and women’s rights more broadly. Watson’s celebrity capital was evident as she secured interviews with feminist authors on behalf of OSS, providing a point of connection between members and public figures. By January 2019, OSS had grown to over 220,000 members and had hosted discussions on topics ranging from feminist literature to personal experiences of sexual discrimination. Watson framed her decision to start the group in the context of her formal UN role, telling prospective members she wanted to “share what I’m learning” and “hear your thoughts too” (Our Shared Shelf, 2016).

These stated aims of interaction and sharing, however, potentially placed Watson the movie star and UN ambassador in close proximity to those who responded to her call to “join up and participate” (Our Shared Shelf, 2016). This raises the question of how Watson’s celebrity status actually *works* in an online community grounded in collaboration and community building, and how she manages her relationship with audiences who sometimes become co-participants, or what we term *user-audience networks* (Chadwick, 2017; Chadwick, O’Loughlin, & Vaccari, 2017). Understanding how these processes play out matters because the response of user-audience networks is today central to how celebrities achieve the legitimacy, the authority, and ultimately the power to switch back and forth between the fields of entertainment and politics. We argue that the ability to translate the celebrity capital generated through entertainment media representations into the political capital required for advocacy and mobilization for political ends

is built on claims to *represent* user-audience networks (Driessens, 2013; Saward, 2010). Our approach to the relationship between celebrity and politics therefore places celebrities' modes of interaction with user-audience networks at the center of explaining how celebrities migrate into the political field. To obtain the political legitimacy required to advocate for feminist causes, Watson needed to gain, and continuously maintain and renew, the acceptance of user-audience networks. Doing so, however, required that she avoid accusations that she was inauthentically stage-managing this process from above, for her own personal or reputational gain.

In this chapter we blend interpretive and digital ethnographic methods to show how Watson performed three types of claim to represent user-audience networks and, in turn, how these claims were evaluated by members of those networks. We show that Watson's activity on the OSS forum allowed her to act in close proximity to co-participants as an *ordinary member* of the forum, while simultaneously creating the social distance that was required for her to be the group's *connected representative*. Watson was actually more visible as the group's external representative when she used her activities beyond the group, particularly her social media posts, to assume the role of *authentic ambassador* for the group's feminist ideas. We argue that Watson's framing of OSS as a discussion "with and between you all" (Our Shared Shelf, 2016) was a carefully formulated rhetorical move. This phrasing managed the contradiction between, on one hand, Watson's minimal levels of direct engagement with others on the OSS group and, on the other hand, her role as a representative of the group. Interviews with ordinary OSS members show that it was precisely Watson's negotiated distance from the everyday entanglements of interaction with user-audience networks that underpinned OSS members' comfortable acceptance of her as a political representative.

Although Watson's celebrity capital supported her representative claims by affording her considerable reach on social media, this capital alone could not facilitate her acceptance as a legitimate representative. It was her connections with formal politics in the UN, together with the perceived appropriateness of her professional self-presentation and engagement at a distance, which enabled OSS members uncomfortable with celebrity to accept and support Watson as a worthy exception. In contrast with the view that digital media place celebrities and audiences in close proximity to each other, by blurring the boundaries between media production and consumption (for example Jenkins, 2006), we show that social distance and boundary maintenance remain key resources that enable entertainment celebrities to act in the political field.

Celebrity and Digital Media: Representing Proximate User-Audiences

We cannot think about celebrity without thinking about audiences. As Driessens (2013) argued, celebrity capital is a resource accumulated through recurrent media representations and can be exchanged or translated as part of a strategy to move between fields. Although celebrity is produced by and through media representations (Rojek, 2001; Turner, 2014) in reality production cannot be isolated from consumption because audiences—and the celebrity's representation of those audiences—are central to celebrity power. Celebrities, Marshall convincingly argued (2014, p. 244), are required to “somehow embody the sentiments of an audience.”

The relationship between celebrities and audiences has, of course, evolved in significant ways over the last decade. Many audience members now publicly produce, or co-produce, the symbolic resources upon which celebrity depends. Whereas mass-media representation underpinned the growth of contemporary celebrity culture (Rojek, 2001), some types of celebrity status no longer require mass media or targeting a mass audience. Social media platforms have

enabled what are called “micro-celebrity” practices—where followers are seen as an audience of fans regardless of how many are watching (Marwick, 2013; Marwick & boyd, 2011)—and new forms of celebrity that are native to the internet (Abidin, 2018). But although these developments may have altered the balance of power between *some* celebrities and their audiences, it is clear that interactions between celebrities and audiences remain the key to understanding why celebrities can come to exercise political power.

Micro-celebrity practices have also found their way into how elite celebrities behave. Everyday efforts to attract attention and build a following online, such as responding directly to followers, and sharing personal information to give the impression of intimacy, have become essential parts of the repertoires of many mainstream celebrities (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Emma Watson has certainly been successful in cultivating a social media following. By 2019 she was rapidly approaching 50 million followers on Instagram, placing her in the top 35 on the platform worldwide. She also had 29 million followers on Twitter and 34 million followers on Facebook.

Whereas most fans could previously only engage in parasocial interaction with entertainment stars (Horton & Wohl, 1952), many now engage directly. Turner has recently argued that the direct interaction enabled by social media “inevitably reduces the distance” between celebrities and audiences (2014, p. 75). And yet, celebrities such as Watson possess resources to manage fame and retain some distance from their audiences. They can choose to make fewer disclosures about their personal lives than internet celebrities who, as Abidin (2018) has shown, hold greater obligation to the audiences they have cultivated. Turner (2014) cautioned that although celebrity is more widely distributed today, it is still based on hierarchical relationships. Not all celebrities engage in constant contact with their fans; indeed the “honorific status” of celebrity, as Rojek described it, is often based on elevation, social distance, and a lack

of “direct, personal reciprocity” (2001, p.12). The key question, as we see it, is how celebrities are able to retain the distance associated with higher status while still representing user-audience networks on social media.

We suggest that this balancing act is particularly important for a celebrity who wants to develop claims to represent people politically, and exercise political power by mobilizing in favour of a cause. Representation is a key part of Bourdieu’s theory of how political actors compete for power. Competition in any field is based on the volume and composition of capital that an agent possesses. Types of capital vary in value, with a current type corresponding to each field as a main power or stake (Bourdieu, 1987). Competition in the political field is competition for the power of mobilization that is an essential part of political capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Whereas other forms of capital such as economic, cultural, or social are exchangeable for movement within or between fields, symbolic capital—the “recognition” obtained within a particular field – is the form capital takes when it is “perceived and recognized as legitimate” (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 4). Symbolic capital in the political field is not simply recognition, but the recognition an agent receives from a specific group. Political capital is specifically derived “from the trust a group places” in the politician. Recognition and credibility in the political field therefore exist “only in and through representation, in and through trust, belief and obedience” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 192). Although the broader legitimacy of celebrities is always connected to their audiences, we argue that celebrities’ ability to obtain political capital requires that they be *perceived as representing that audience in the political field*.

We augment this insight from Bourdieu with Saward’s argument that representation is not a so-called “static fact” confined to electoral politics, but is performed through claims “to represent or know what represents the interests of someone or something” (Saward, 2010, p. 38).

Saward argued that representative claims are legitimated through acceptance by what he terms “appropriate constituencies”: those who are invoked or who consider themselves to be implicated in a claim (p.148). This places audiences at the heart of political recognition; indeed representative claims cannot exist unless “audiences acknowledge them in some way” (p. 48). Such acknowledgement, where expressed as acceptance, empowers a celebrity to act politically.

To exchange celebrity capital for political capital, therefore, Watson needed to construct claims to represent certain groups of citizens as she intervened in the political field. Watson’s large social media followings certainly lend support to such claims; yet too much engagement with audiences might undermine the social distance associated with elite celebrity status. This balancing act between proximity and distance is further complicated in the context of OSS, as we now discuss, due to the community-oriented affordances of online message forums.

Community and Celebrity: The Affordances of *Our Shared Shelf*

Standing before the UN General Assembly in September 2014, Emma Watson was “reaching out” to the millions who watched her speech online because, as she said, “we need your help” (UN Women, 2014). Watson situated OSS within her role as a UN Goodwill Ambassador, telling prospective participants she wanted to “share what I am learning” from reading “as part of my work with UN Women” (Our Shared Shelf, 2016). By 2019, 1.7 million people had taken the UN’s “HeForShe commitment” by completing a form on the campaign’s website, pledging to “take action against gender bias, discrimination and violence.” The campaign claimed to have sparked 1.3 billion “social media conversations” (HeForShe, 2016), even though it did not afford obvious opportunities for supporters to communicate with each other. Although HeForShe’s website provided resources and ideas for those seeking to “take

action” it lacked a dedicated platform to share ideas or information. In practice, the structure, aims, and affordances of Watson’s online feminist book group and discussion forum varied significantly from UN Women’s HeForShe campaign. OSS afforded greater opportunity for citizens to communicate, collaborate, and build networks. But this presented Watson with tensions to negotiate as she performed claims to represent user-audience networks.

Watson wanted to “share” what she was learning, yet she told prospective members: I want to “hear your thoughts too” (Our Shared Shelf, 2016). When the group reached 100,000 Watson (2014d) described her pride in the burgeoning community she perceived, praising the “amazing… level at which I see these topics being engaged with and discussed.” The forum provided spaces for members to discuss the books selected on a bimonthly basis—usually by Watson—and to contribute to discussions on a broad range of topics related (and unrelated) to feminism. Other sub-forums provided space for members to arrange meetups, pass books on to others, and suggest ideas for the group or books for selection. Beyond OSS the affordances of the Goodreads platform encourage discussion and connection between members, who can add each other as “friends,” leave comments on their own or friends’ profiles, and send and receive private messages. OSS is publicly visible, but participation requires a Goodreads account and joining the group.

This, combined with the visible moderation of the forum, has specific benefits for people seeking to engage with feminist discussion online. The affordances of social media platforms such as Twitter have enabled feminist campaigns to spread rapidly, mobilize, and build affective solidarity by sharing experiences of discrimination and sexual violence (Bates, 2014; Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2019). However social media have also become significant sites of sexist harassment, as feminist activists have been targeted and threatened (Amnesty International,

2018; Cochrane, 2013; Jane, 2017). The affordances of message forums are better suited to deeper discussion and community-building, as the structure and slower pace of threads enable greater reciprocity and reflexivity (Graham, Jackson, & Wright, 2016).

OSS is not only a message forum but also a hybrid media creation, merging the symbolic resources of Hollywood with the internet. Watson's decision to establish a feminist book group was consistent with her most well-known persona in the field of global film entertainment. Her continued association with Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter* movies reinforced her image as a "purely good character" (O'Donnell, 2017, p. 117), aligned with aspirational values of "high achievement" (Mendick, Allen, Harvey, & Ahmed, 2018, p. 156). However, Watson's obvious institutional connections and elite celebrity status might have jeopardized her claim to represent her OSS constituency. If Watson did not live up to the implicit promise to participate on equal terms with the OSS user-audience there was potential for disappointment among those seeking interaction. Although online communities of this sort are not without forms of leadership, they rarely feature fixed hierarchy and centralized authority (Bruns, 2008). If celebrities' ability to obtain political capital is contingent on claims to represent user-audiences, how did Watson make such claims? And how did user-audiences respond?

Fieldwork and Data

We use an online ethnographic approach to study how Watson made claims to represent the OSS group across fields and platforms. The lead author (Watts) joined the group in March 2016, reading the books selected for discussion, occasionally posting messages, and monitoring online coverage of Watson through daily Google News alerts. She collected and made notes on the following content between January 2016 and January 2017: Watson's 32 posts on the OSS

forum, her interviews with feminist authors, her Goodreads profile, her presentation of herself and OSS across Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and references to Watson's activism in online news and entertainment media. These data were analyzed through open thematic coding to assess how Watson presented her role in OSS and her relationship to user-audience networks. The analysis included, for example, tagging references to Watson's UN role, language positioning her among OSS members, and statements from Watson and OSS members inviting interaction. We use these data to demonstrate how Watson performed three distinct representative claims, while managing her proximity and distance from user-audiences.

We wanted to understand OSS members' motivations for engaging with the group, and their evaluations of Watson as a representative, without relying only on accounts from the group's most active members. The 22 participants—recruited through a message Watts posted on the forum—included some of the most active members who had posted over 1,000 times but also four members who had never posted at all. Participants (referenced herein by pseudonym) ranged in age from 19 to 69, and were living in nine countries across Europe, North America, and Central America. Interviews were conducted by Watts through email, Goodreads private messages, and Skype. Participants were sent nine questions; we draw on responses to the following questions in this chapter:

1. Why did you want to join Our Shared Shelf?
2. Were you already following Emma Watson's feminist activism before (through HeForShe and/or through her social media)?
3. If so, what was it about Emma Watson and/or her activism that made you want to get involved?
4. What do you do on OSS, and what do you most enjoy about being part of it?

Watson's Representative Claims

On launching *Our Shared Shelf* Watson told readers she would “post some questions/quotes to get things started” and invite “prominent voices” to “join the conversation,” a conversation she framed as an “open discussion with and between you all” (*Our Shared Shelf*, 2016). However, Watson’s visible engagement on the forum during the period of analysis was limited: she did not interact with other members, and her self-presentation was guarded. To understand how Watson’s political capital derived from claims to represent OSS therefore required going beyond the boundaries of its message forum. We find that Watson used digital media more broadly to perform three distinct claims to represent user-audience networks; we term these connected representative, ordinary member, and authentic ambassador.

Watson as connected representative

Watson’s self-presentation on OSS was predominantly professional and impersonal. Her Goodreads profile featured a black and white headshot and sparse personal information, her only listed interest being “Our Shared Shelf.” This caution extended to her limited use of Goodreads’ affordances for sharing, as Watson did not rate the books she introduced to the group or write reviews upon which others could comment. This was indicative of how Watson constructed her relationship with co-participants, a relationship framed around *responsibilities toward* rather than *rappor with* others. Watson noted the responsibility she felt to “figure out the next best thing to read” for a group which had become “much more international than… expected—and much bigger” (Watson, 2016d, 2016e). Acting as an educated facilitator, Watson encouraged members to link books to political issues while maintaining her distance by rarely sharing her own views. Introducing Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, for example, Watson (2017b) encouraged members to think “beyond the tag” and “share our thoughts about how we think its dystopian

vision relates to the world of 2017.” In many respects this approach – in which Watson played an enabling role rather than seeking direct mobilization - derives from an earlier period in the web’s development. This is in stark contrast with the social media “influencer” model that has become dominant in recent years.

Watson promised that she would be “harassing whoever I need to harass to get questions answered” (Watson, 2016d). By interviewing feminist authors on behalf of OSS, Watson demonstrated her growing political capital by connecting the group to her own elite networks. Some interviews also afforded opportunities to represent OSS to broader audiences; Watson’s interview with *Persepolis* author Marjane Satrapi, for example, was published by *Vogue*. This interview, however, highlighted the tensions generated by attempting to balance proximity and distance. Although Watson (2016g) promised to ask “as many as I can,” she put only two member questions to Satrapi during her conversation with the author. Responses on the forum suggested members appreciated this personal style, praising the “genuine conversation” and “unedited” exchange between people with a “real connection.” It therefore appeared less important that Watson directly represent OSS’s views to broader audiences than that OSS could gain a backstage glimpse of the guarded star. This raises the question of whether Watson’s generally professional, even impersonal self-presentation placed her at too great a distance from members to be accepted as genuine.

Watson as ordinary member of OSS

Watson also used language in her forum posts to construct a very different type of representative claim—one that positioned her *among* others as an ordinary member with shared interests and experiences. Watson’s (2016b) first book announcement struck a conversational tone; she told members she was “reading it with a pen in hand” and making “a cup of peppermint

tea.” Watson’s announcement posts continued to give the impression she was “learning and reading with” co-participants. She said that she was “excited” to “read this book with you” and to “hear what you think” (Watson, 2016c, 2016e, 2016f).

Crucially, this positioned Watson as fellow learner rather than all-knowing authority, and seemingly flattened the hierarchy between her and OSS members. Watson (2017a) used an uncharacteristically long and personal post (to announce OSS would read Reni Eddo-Lodge’s *Why I Am No Longer Talking To White People About Race*) as a means of addressing criticism that her feminism was exclusive. Here Watson’s UN speech was no longer a source of expertise, but the start of what she described as a “journey” and an “interrogation of self.” She related this to each member’s “own journey,” telling co-participants she was “looking forward to discussing” the book “in more detail... soon.”

Watson benefitted from this opportunity to perform her learning through claims to ordinariness. Her post was remediated through online news and entertainment media, as commentators praised her “acknowledgement” of White privilege and “lesson in self-awareness” (Animashaun, 2018; Bradley, 2018; Canty, 2018; Kelly, 2018; Muller, 2018; Okolosie, 2018). Despite this claim to be on a shared journey, in practice Watson’s direct engagement with forum members was close to non-existent. Between January 2016 and April 2017 Watson published 34 posts, 24 of which were announcements. Although Watson’s (2016a) first-ever post reassured a member that “I’m here! I am having the best time reading these discussion boards！”, of the eight posts we coded as interactions, seven were made in the group’s first two weeks. Her announcement posts received between 126 and 1,241 responses, suggesting an appetite for interaction that might have quickly turned to disappointment.

Watson's celebrity status was difficult to reconcile with claims to ordinary participation in an online community. She was both a connected representative above the group, and an ordinary member among co-participants. We now discuss how Watson used social media to perform a third, more complex claim to be an authentic ambassador for members across fields and platforms. Paradoxically, these platforms—often associated with interactivity—enabled Watson to perform engagement from a distance.

Watson as authentic ambassador

Watson was most visible as the group's representative *outside* of OSS, where she used social media to retain connection with members at a distance as their authentic ambassador. This positioned Watson both within *and* above the group, her celebrity capital and social media posts enabling her to represent OSS to wider audiences. She did this directly by performing her engagement through social media, and indirectly as this content became remediated through online news. By using social media and not the group forum itself to perform representative claims, she maintained the distance from user-audience networks that has traditionally been associated with celebrities of high status (Marshall, 2014; Rojek, 2001).

Instagram was essential to performing this role. Sharing selfies with books and reposting content from the group's Instagram account, she broadened her invitation to “let me know what you think” to her 50 million followers (oursharedshelf, 2017). She used social media to create the opportunity for members to feel they were “reading along” with her, in real time: she posted a selfie with the first group selection (Gloria Steinem's *My Life on the Road*), asking followers “Who has their book?” (emmawatson, 2016a). Following this, members began sharing their own OSS selfies (or “shelfies” as they became known) to demonstrate their participation, and by January 2019 #OurSharedShelf had been used in almost 24,000 Instagram posts. By stating she

could “literally see” these contributions, Watson (2016d) reinforced the impression that she and other members were co-producing a campaign in and beyond the OSS forum.

The attention Watson received from international news and entertainment media sources supported her representative claim, as she connected OSS to wider audiences. When Watson collaborated with the Books on The Underground project in November 2016—leaving copies of a Maya Angelou book selected for OSS in London stations—her Instagram video was viewed over 4.2 million times and 64 news articles about her intervention were published (emmawatson, 2016b). Watson documented her engagement with feminist campaigns across social media, mediating, for example, her participation in the Women’s March in Washington DC in January 2017 on Facebook (Emma Watson, 2017).

This claim was not only performed across platforms but across fields, as illustrated by her public reflections about her starring role in Disney’s 2017 remake of *Beauty and the Beast*. Watson claimed she had “turned down” *Cinderella* because the lead character was not a “role model” (Frost, 2017), instead crafting a backstory of “empowering defiance” for the character of Belle in *Beauty and the Beast* (Furness, 2017). When her view that Belle is a feminist role model was contested, Watson told *Entertainment Weekly* (2017) she had shared these concerns and addressed them by “doing some reading.” Watson even took OSS author Gloria Steinem to the film’s premiere (MacKelden, 2017). This consistency “across all aspects of [her] life and communications,” which Marwick (2013, p. 240) argued is key to perceived authenticity, supported Watson’s claim to be ambassador for OSS in her absences from the forum.

Thus, Watson performed three types of claim to represent members of her online feminist book group and discussion forum. As connected representative she foregrounded elite connections, while as ordinary member she positioned herself as a fellow learner. By channeling

her engagement with OSS outside the forum, particularly on Instagram, Watson balanced proximity and distance from user-audiences by acting as authentic ambassador across fields. Although these claims co-existed in tension, Watson’s ability to perform them demonstrates the volume and variety of her resources. But was Watson accepted as a representative of an online community grounded in co-participation, despite her elevated status? We now turn to our analysis of interviews with a small sample of OSS members. We show that Watson’s distance from members—both in terms of her engagement with them and her elite connections—was in fact key to the broad acceptance of her claims to represent feminism in the political field.

How did User-Audiences Evaluate Watson’s Representative Claims?

Interviews with OSS members suggested the relationship between the group’s celebrity founder and its user-audiences was complex. Our aim here is not to make generalizations about the views of the entire membership of OSS, but to explore the connections between Watson’s representative claims and how the 22 members we interviewed described the celebrity and her relationship with the group. This first requires some understanding of Watson’s role in motivating these members to join. When asked what prompted them to join OSS, participants’ responses suggest they were often (though not exclusively) made aware of the group through content posted by or about Watson. Eight noted seeing OSS on Watson’s social media, five noted prior engagement with HeForShe, and five reported seeing online news articles about OSS and Watson with two specifically noting her aforementioned collaboration with Books on the Underground/Subway. In contrast three mentioned the election of Donald Trump as a prompt for joining OSS, while only two noted finding the group through the Goodreads website itself.

Although most participants discovered OSS through Watson, it would therefore be a mistake to assume that members are motivated to join purely by the potential for proximity to the celebrity. Though eight participants noted Watson's involvement as a reason for joining, members held multiple motivations for wanting to do so; a love of reading ($n = 12$), looking for a community (11), and wanting to learn (11) were mentioned more frequently. Participants also described an identification with feminism (8), looking for discussion (5), wanting to take action (4), and looking to teach others (2) as motivating factors. Our 22 participants ranged from undying Watson fan, to uninterested reader.

We argue that Watson's use of digital media to represent OSS from a distance afforded her broad acceptance from these varied members. Interestingly, those who had followed Watson's journey most closely did not want to see her engage more directly with the group. Her hands-off role was seen as appropriate, and OSS not the platform to seek interaction. Alex, for example (all names are pseudonyms), said that she sent Watson multiple letters but was "comfortable" with her role in OSS, "posting about the new book and that was more or less it." By not intervening in discussions Watson avoided being seen to speak *over* rather than for members, behaving as if, in Alex's words, "I'm the big queen and I'm going to rule over every one of you!" Rosa agreed that OSS was not the place for Watson's opinions: "I like the way she proposes books and thoughts of others, not presenting them as her own philosophy."

Watson's celebrity capital was necessary to her acceptance as a representative, however, due to what she *did* with her status, when she gave "voice to a lot of women that haven't that choice" and used her "voice for something positive in the world" (Bianca; Maria). The participants who described Watson as admirable or inspirational often based their views on Watson's use of fame to promote feminism (see Table 1 below). Watson's representative claims

were accepted because she could “get more audience” for feminist issues, bring “a huge (and certainly diverse) crowd of people” together, and make “gender equality issues more accessible for the “every day” person” (Rosa; Louise; Chloe). The scale of Watson’s celebrity capital was therefore essential to its exchangeability; her ability to attract attention to OSS and promote its values key to her acceptance by user-audience networks.

Participants often discussed Watson by comparing her to “other celebrities.” These comparisons revealed participants’ discomfort with associating too closely with celebrities in general, but—and this is significant—not Watson specifically. Rosa revealed her initial concern about listening to Watson “just because she’s famous”—which Rosa said felt like “teenage behaviour”—but changed her mind after “reading her posts and listening.” Similarly, Matthew described himself as “wary of celebrity” but after “learning more of her life” through “her media presence” concluded Watson was “as hardworking as she is gifted and earned all she had.” Thus, Watson’s engagement at a distance enabled her to gain acceptance as an exceptional type of political celebrity.

Intriguingly it was not only Watson’s spatial distance from members, but also her *social* distance from them, which afforded this acceptance. Views about Watson’s role as UN Women Goodwill Ambassador often underpinned group members’ perceptions of her as admirable or inspiring, and behaving in the “right way” for a celebrity who wishes to intervene in politics. Tricia, for example, was “not interested in ping pong Twitter insults or threats” and saw Watson as “taking the high road and going through formal channels...i.e. the UN.” Watson’s official capacity at the UN also strengthened her claim to be in a position to effect political change. For Alex, Watson’s ability to talk “to Justin Trudeau and to so many people” meant, in a telling phrase, that it was “a bit ridiculous to question her.”

This perceived appropriateness of Watson's self-presentation also afforded her acceptance by forum members as a "deserving" celebrity—a class-based distinction Mendick et al. (2018) have argued has become central to how young people understand meritocracy. For Alyssa, it was "nice to see a young celebrity who's not getting involved in scandals and drugs...actually doing good productive work in the world." Although Claudia praised other young celebrities who "stand up," Watson was contrasted positively as "more down to earth and considerate" than those who are "loud and have a kind of 'I don't give a shit' vibe." These comparisons benefited Watson: she was seen as using her celebrity capital to "engage in issues that really matter and do some good in the world—and not just for a PR stunt," explained Chloe.

Crucially however, the distance afforded by Watson's elite institutional connections and appropriate self-presentation did not preclude her from being described as "relatable," "genuine," and "trustworthy." Sophia described Watson as "genuine" because in "every interview or article written about her she has the same message shine through that makes you trust and believe in her." For Chloe it was admirable that Watson had not been "spoilt" by having been "thrown into the public eye," again supporting Mendick et al.'s argument that consistency matters because audiences assess whether celebrities appear "changed" in a negative way by their wealth and fame (2018, p. 60). Although Watson's high celebrity capital therefore supported a claim to have wide reach, exchanging this celebrity capital through acceptance as a political representative is a fine balancing act with audiences at its core.

Table 1. Perceptions of Watson as a Representative

Watson is perceived as	Number of participants
Admirable/inspirational	9
Serious (due to institutional links)	6
Serious (in comparison with other celebrities)	6
Relatable	6
Authentic (“genuine”, or doing things “for the right reasons”)	4
Committed to the cause	4
Trustworthy	3
Knowledgeable	3
A role model for young women	2

Digital Distance: Celebrity Power and User-Audience Networks

In this chapter we have explained how Emma Watson used her celebrity capital and media platforms to construct claims to represent *Our Shared Shelf*, the feminist book group and discussion forum she founded in 2016, and, as a consequence, her claims to represent feminist ideas more broadly. Watson’s celebrity status, and indeed her three claims to represent other members, could potentially have been at odds with the aims and affordances of the group. We have argued that representative claims are necessary because they act as mechanisms through which celebrities attempt to exchange celebrity capital for political capital. We demonstrate that the scale or magnitude of celebrity capital alone is not sufficient to produce the kind of recognition that is required to act in the political field. Although the OSS members valued Watson’s elevated status, there was also some reluctance to associate with celebrity in general. By founding an online forum for conversation “with and between you all” Watson carefully negotiated the balance between proximity to, and distance from, the user-audience networks that were key to legitimating her role as a political agent. But this balancing act was a challenging

one. Would participants seeking interaction with Watson as a co-participant in an online forum be disappointed with her limited direct engagement in practice? Would Watson's proximity to members hinder her efforts to obtain political recognition, due to the interconnection between distance and status?

Although social media have previously been associated with interactivity and reduced distance between celebrities and their audiences (Turner, 2014), we found that social media enabled Watson to represent user-audience networks while retaining appropriate distance. Watson's posts on the OSS forum itself constructed two types of claim that were challenging to reconcile: she drew on her status and connections as the group's connected representative, while also positioning herself as an ordinary member of the group. Through her social media practices Watson performed a more complex claim to be an authentic ambassador for user-audience networks, representing their broadly shared interests across fields and platforms while rarely revealing details of her personal life. This enabled Watson to keep her distance while retaining her role as a representative.

Indeed, we argue Watson's balance of proximity and distance was a fundamental element of her acceptance as a representative of feminism. Watson was perceived as a sufficiently serious representative in comparison with other celebrities due to her connection to the UN and positive assessments of her cautious self-presentation. Our analysis suggests that the management of proximity and distance remains key to the maintenance of celebrity status—and key to how celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital.

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