Run Like a Girl:
Corporate, Mainstream, and Feminist Influences on Women’s Distance Running in the United States,
1960-1985
The Greek myth of Atalanta told the story of a swift-footed huntress favored by the goddess Artemis. Her father, Schoeneus, allowed her to live in his palace under one condition: she must marry a man. To preserve her virginity and honor Artemis, Atalanta demanded to only marry the man who could beat her in a footrace. Many suitors failed to beat Atalanta. She only married when Hippomenes won the race by tricking Atalanta to pick up the apples he tossed in front of her in order to slow her down.¹ Pressure for women runners to conform to societal standards of femininity, as depicted in this myth, existed in real life and continued well into the twentieth century.

Women distance runners populated ancient stories and myths like the story of Atalanta. Additionally, women in ancient Greece participated in their own Olympics to honor the goddess Hera through a footrace.² However, from the nineteenth until the mid-twentieth century, women in the United States were barred from distance running competitions by the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU.) With the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s, along with Kathrine Switzer racing in the Boston marathon in 1967, women began to demand access to distance running competitions. Whereas feminist rhetoric and leisure fitness challenged accepted notions of femininity in the context of beauty, popular expectations resisted changes in women’s role. Corporate involvement aided the rise of the women’s distance running competitions, but business interests also reinforced pre-existing beauty ideals through a new market for advertising products. Influenced by both feminist activism and corporate interests, the rise of women’s leisure running both challenged and reinforced traditional standards of femininity.

The paper starts with a brief history of women in distance walking competitions before the 1960s. The history of the women’s marathon in the United States after Kathrine Switzer ran the Boston Marathon in 1967 follows. Discussions of changing beauty standards continues and influences by popular culture as well as athletics. Explanations of society’s resistance against women runners appears along with how corporations worked to maintain a focus on women’s outward appearance. Corporate sponsorship and commercialization of women runners follows. Finally, it will show different women’s experiences with running and how women tried maintain their middle-class expectations. From the 1960s through the 1980s, athletics increasingly affected ideal beauty standards. Women’s distance running also reshaped expectations of female beauty.

Since the creation of Title IX in 1972 and the women’s Olympic Marathon event in 1984, numerous scholars have produced works about female distance running. Other scholars have addressed female beauty in regards to athletics. Many works address running only briefly, often in a single chapter, rather than devoting an entire book to the subject. Kathrine Switzer’s impact on distance running appears across the few works devoted specifically to female running.

Secondary literature concerning female athletes takes a broad approach to the subject. Books by Jamie Schultz, Susan Ware, and Susan Cahn look at the history of women in athletics during the twentieth century. These authors provide insight into the history of women in athletics by addressing a broad range of sports, from basketball to gymnastics. They also argue for the impact of athletics on beauty standards.

Schultz, for example, looks at these impacts through the cultural shifts that happened in regards to female beauty in the context of sports. Schultz’s work, such as her book Qualifying
Times (2014) and her article “Discipline and Push-Up” (2004) also looks at the history of female beauty and athletics through the rise of women’s athletic wear. Both her book and article extensively discuss the development of the sports bra. Images of what it meant to be a woman through the context of sports bras, as argued by Schultz, provide a different lens to look at images of femininity and athletics. Shultz also addresses the use of second-wave feminist rhetoric in the context of athletics, however, not in the distance running context specifically.

Different scholarship exists on which sports were considered acceptable for women. Susan Cahn’s book, Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women’s Sport (2015) explains and argues how sports such as tennis, basketball, or baseball and mentions of distance running as so-called unfeminine. Works from Ware and Cahn also take into account issues behind race and class in the context of athletics, which help to fill these gaps in some of the primary sources. Few scholarly works focus on women’s running only.

The history of distance running and its rise to Olympic status appears in multiple different secondary sources. For example, work such as Olympic Marathon: A Centennial History of the Games’ Most Storied Race (1997), by Charles Lovett, outlines the history of the Olympic Marathon. This work includes a section about the women’s Olympic marathon after its creation in 1984. This work provides an introduction to the sport, and also outlines the requirements that had to be fulfilled in order for the event to come into existence. The essay “Women’s Participation in Distance Running” (2016) by Laura Frances Chase gives a history of

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the women’s marathon that looks beyond Kathrine Switzer and the Boston Marathon. Chase outlines the development of other women’s distance running competition, and the impacts of different sponsored races.  

The scholarship regarding women’s distance running comes mostly from author Pamela J. Cooper. Cooper’s extensive work regarding corporate involvement provides insight as to how women’s running became an institutionalized sport through corporate involvement. Her work, “Marathon Women and the Corporation” (1995), explains how corporations impacted the growth of women’s running. Cooper’s writings also provide insight about sponsorship for women’s running in America during the 1960s-1980s.  

Focusing on corporate involvement in the women’s marathon, she connected evolving standards of beauty to corporate sponsorship. She also argues for the impact of second-wave feminism and its effects on class and ethnicity. Where some primary sources do not address the problems of class, Cooper’s work explores the topics and problems with race and class as it relates to distance running. Extant scholarship also fails to address the impact that distance running had on ideals of female beauty from the 1960s through the 1980s. This paper also will take up this question.  

Sources concerning changes in female beauty throughout the 1960s through the 1980s provide a lens to look at primary sources that concerned female athletic bodies. Books such as Naomi Wolf’s The Beauty Myth (1991) shows the damaging effects of certain beauty images to women and the creation of these images. Wolf argues that beauty is a social construct that changes in order to maintain control over women and their bodies.  

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especially those regarding food and hunger, can be applied to women’s health and the way that it translates to a woman’s image. The ideas presented in the works can be applied to the interviews and quotes from female athletes in the primary sources. Wolf’s analysis of popular culture and explanations of representations of body fat can apply to the context of running. *The Body Project* (1997) by Joan Jacobs Brumberg, looked at the history of female beauty from the nineteenth century to the 1990s and how it impacted young women. *The Body Project* argues that women throughout history have experienced different insecurities in regards to their body and demonstrates how they addressed those challenges. The author includes images of advertisements from different eras, demonstrating the impact of athleticism in the late twentieth century. While these books might not address athletics specifically, they provide a background to understand the shifts in female beauty.

In order to gain an understanding of the development of the women’s marathon, and its impact on beauty standards and use of feminist rhetoric, a variety of primary source materials are beneficial. These sources mainly focused on American running. However, articles discussing international marathons explore the impact of corporations and the creation of the women’s Olympic marathon event. The sources centered around American running and American beauty standards and second-wave feminism rhetoric as the popularity of sports and athletics for health and beauty rose during the 1960s through the 1980s. American woman were both the first to officially run the Boston Marathon in 1967 and to win the women’s Olympic marathon in 1984. Their stories served as inspiration for this paper as well as marking the start and end dates of this study.

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While researching the history of the women’s marathon in America and the growth of leisure running, major national newspapers provided a general context and milestones to create a timeline of events. Through the use of *The New York Times* and *The Chicago Tribune* databases, and through exploring topics regarding the Boston Marathon and the Avon International Marathon Circuit, a timeline of these milestones arose. Before Kathrine Switzer ran the Boston Marathon in 1967, few articles mentioned women running. There are mentions of women competing in distance walking competitions in the nineteenth century, which create arguments for women’s distance competitions pre-1960. However, after the 1967 Boston Marathon, articles about women runners beginning to break down gender barriers in sports increased. Articles about women athletes increased even more after the implementation of Title IX in 1972. The articles also create a timeline of how the women’s marathon became an Olympic event, including first international all women marathons that cosmetic corporations sponsored.

Not only do these newspapers provide a timeline for women participating in distance running competitions, they also provide insight to the general public’s reactions. The papers often included interviews with the women who competed in races, as well as how those who witnessed the races and events felt about women athletes. These articles, such as interviews with Kathrine Switzer, revealed the influence of second-wave feminism that accompanied the growth of women’s distance running. These interviews showed how the women runners saw themselves as challenging society’s expectation of women and women athletes.

While these different articles proved useful in getting primary interviews with the women who challenged the barriers of sport competition, there are limitations to newspaper coverage. Many articles focused on the athlete’s appearance rather than her accomplishments. While this tendency limits the usefulness of newspaper accounts in terms of gaining an understanding of
athletic ability, it demonstrates the importance of outward appearance. This original limitation turned useful in regards to research questions about feminine beauty in regards to athletics. However, newspapers do not provide explicit commentary on new standards of beauty in the 1970s and 1980s. For this purpose, periodicals are more useful.

Different lifestyle periodicals like *Time Magazine, Women’s Home Journal, and Look*, showed the changing beauty standards for women and their shift throughout the period from 1960 to 1985. They showed how women began to enter the world of athletics that had been dominated by men and its influence on the ideal female body. These periodicals showed the growth of leisure sports for health, as well as the new ideal body physical activity helped achieve. The lifestyle periodicals focused more on the growth of the athletic female body and how a woman should balance athletics while maintaining her feminine beauty. However, these lifestyle magazines provided an insight to how women might perceive the new societal idea regarding the ideal body. These perceptions provided insight into the feminist rhetoric regarding the implementation of sport as a reflection of a woman’s own personal growth and her own empowerment.

Neither newspapers nor periodicals describe how women trained for running competitions or reveal women’s own experiences with running. Running books for women written in the 1970s through the 1980s, however, provide insight on these topics. Written by women runners, *Women’s Running* by Doctor Joan Ullyot and *The Beauty of Running* by Gayle Barron provided practical advice to women who joined the running revolution in the 1970s and 1980s. These books, published in 1977 and 1980 respectively, showed how drastically and quickly the sport of running changed for women. These books reflected changing standards of female beauty and addressed specific concerns such as breast health. The variety of different
sources, some applying directly to distance running and some relating to the development of women’s sports, help to answer questions regarding women athletes and running.

This paper focuses on white, middle class women and the beauty standards and changes associated with them. The primary sources used mostly addressed issues associated with white, middle class women. They do not address how women outside of these boundaries could join the sport of running. However, another area of study and source of questions regarding women and running would be to look at the African American or other non-white groups and their experiences with running. It would also be interesting to look at a similar question regarding beauty standards and athletics from a non-white perspective.

For questions of how to define beauty and the challenges that running presented to a beauty standard, the paper utilized ideas from The Beauty Myth. According to The Beauty Myth, ideas of a woman’s beauty change throughout history, but the first public mentions began around the 1830s when industrialization rapidly increased in the United States. As industrialization began to take hold and new technologies such as fashion plates and photographs helped to spread mass media of how a woman should look. These ideas of how women should look continued after the Industrial Revolution, and “…masqueraded [itself] as a natural component[s] of the feminine sphere, the better to enclose women inside it.” The idea of beauty, according to Wolf, was an important aspect of femininity. Beauty mostly encompassed what men found attractive at the time and used it as a way to maintain control over women.

Challenges of acceptable femininity as athletics and running rose throughout the time frame of this paper appear throughout different primary sources. General ideals for middle-class

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11 The Beauty Myth 12.
women in the 1950s and into the 1960s showed a reflection of Cold War mentality of stability and security. Valued traits for femininity included cooperation, passivity, and security. During the 1960s, the ideas of a so-called “contained” and “housewife” image began to crack with the rise of second-wave feminism.12

The experiences of women will be discussed in the context of second-wave feminist rhetoric. Throughout the paper, the definition of second-wave feminism that will be referenced comes from *A Dictionary of Gender Studies* by Oxford University Press. Gabriele Griffin defines second-wave feminism as a part of the women’s liberation movement that occurred roughly between 1965 and 1985. The movement included campaigns for equality, equal work for equal pay, wages for housework, and others. Second-wave feminism however, received criticism for not including diverse or non-white women in their policies and arguments.13 Through the arguments presented in the different sources, women’s running felt the impacts of beauty standards, second-wave feminism, and corporate involvement. Before women began to compete in distance running competitions more frequently, women’s distance walking competitions began to appear.

Women’s distance running took off drastically in the 1960s. However, past women competed in other forms of distance competitions. Women competed in distance walking competitions during the late nineteenth century. Women walked over the course of many days and sometimes as long as 200 miles. For example, during Go-As-You-Please Baltimore race in 1889, women walked farther than 300 miles. Participants had six days to complete the race with

no specified distance; the goal was to walk as far as possible in the allotted time.\textsuperscript{14} The women walking often won cash money for these races.

As the distances grew, the walking races changed from a competition to more of a viewing spectacle. Newspapers such as \textit{The New York Times} reported on these competitions. Many articles criticized female competitors for challenging middle-class Victorian ideals dictating that women remain inside the home, caring for the family in the domestic sphere.\textsuperscript{15} According to one article, “Walking in Six Cities”, from 1897: “[The] spectacle of so young and apparently modest and respectable a lady exhibiting herself before a crowd of young men was not a pleasing one.”\textsuperscript{16} According to the reporter, men’s comments critical enough that if a walker head them, “she would wait for some time before going into the walking business again.”\textsuperscript{17} While outward feminist rhetoric did not appear for many of the women walkers, most of the public scrutiny revolved around the possible connection of the walkers to the suffrage movement.\textsuperscript{18} In both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, women competing in distance competitions challenged societal expectations.

These women walkers raised questions, not only about Victorian ideals of womanhood but also about potential health risks. Some articles commented on competitors’ health, wondering if they would be able to complete the competition.\textsuperscript{19} These trends continued throughout the twentieth century as well. Before the twentieth century, the chief concerns with women in distance competitions included medical dangers and leaving the home. At the turn of


\textsuperscript{15} \textit{The Beauty Myth} 14.


\textsuperscript{17} “Walking in Six Cities.”


\textsuperscript{19} “The Female Pedestrians.”
the century, women’s opportunities for distance running increased, but so did restrictions on
women runners in competition.

Women competed races before the 1960s. Melpomene was the first recorded woman to
run a marathon in 1896. She competed unofficially in Athens and ran alongside the men’s race.
In the 1920s, the races were no more than 800 meters, and during the Olympics in 1928, some
poorly-trained women collapsed after they ran. Before 1972, the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU)
barred women from competing in races longer than 1500 meters. The AAU cited medical
concerns as the main reason to bar women from running. American marathons like the Boston
Marathon excluded women from competing until 1972. However, some women unofficially
raced before 1972. For example, Roberta Gibb Bingay ran the Boston marathon in 1966. Gibb
Bingay explained: “The reason I’m running is because a lot of my friends encouraged me to
share the feelings of joy I get while running.” Her mother even added that Gibb Bignay did not
want to “break any barriers.” Contrary to statements by other women runners during the 1970s,
Gibb Bignay did not run Boston to make a feminist statement. However, after the 1967 Boston
Marathon, women runners saw massive advancements for the sport.

Kathrine Switzer’s participation in the Boston Marathon in 1967 was a catalyst for
women’s running. Switzer officially registered for the race under her first initial and last name.
During the race, race officials attempted to force Switzer from the course after learning that “K.

Switzer: was a woman. Boston Marathon race director Will Cloney opposed women runners and argued for following the AAU rules banning their participation. He claimed: “Women can’t run in the marathon because the rules forbid it…unless we have rules, society will be in chaos…if that girl were my daughter I would spank her.”25 Although Switzer finished the marathon, the AAU suspended her from future competitions.26

After this race, more women participated in distance running competitions, like the Boston Marathon, despite the sex restrictions of many races remaining until around 1972. For instance, women were involved in Road Runners Clubs across America. The Road Runners Club provided a space for runners to train for races as well as to find like-minded individuals with passions for running. For example, women like secretary Nina Kuscik ran with the New York Road Runners Club of America in order to train for the Boston Marathon in 1969.27

During the 1970s and through the 1980s, participation in leisure running increased drastically. By 1981, there were 30 million confirmed runners in the United States.28 With the increase of Americans running, more books emerged to assist with runners as they began their journey. However, the majority of these books did not address women’s running. Books like *Running for Your Life: The Bill Emmerton Method of Fitness and Health* laid out the many benefits of jogging. The book, published in 1970, explained that benefits of jogging included

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resistance to illness, mental alertness, and weight stabilization. The book only mentioned men, and excluded women runners entirely, despite the possibility of the health benefits applying to women. However, as the 1970s progressed, more running books specifically for women were published. These books provided tools for women to get out and run. Numbers of leisure runners grew as women began to enter running competitions.

As women’s running competitions increased, so did corporate sponsorship of competitive running events, including marathons during the 1970s. This involvement increased the number of women runners and legitimized women’s distance running. For example, the New York City Marathon’s number of participants increased by allowing women runners. More participants meant more money flowing to sponsoring companies through things such as tee-shirt sales.

Throughout the 1970s, beauty cosmetic companies began to sponsor running competitions themselves. The sponsorship of competitions by these companies resulted in an even bigger increase of women running in more competitions. For example, the mini marathon, a distance of only six miles, saw a drastic increase of involvement when the event was taken over by cosmetics company Bonne Bell in 1977. Race participation was 2,231 women racers, which far exceeded the expected number. Women competitive runners continued to increase, especially after Avon Cosmetics began sponsoring running events.

Arguably, the most important corporation for women’s distance running competitions was Avon Cosmetics. The company legitimized the women’s marathon and promoted it as an Olympic sport. Kathrine Switzer, fourteen years after running the Boston Marathon and a-then

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Avon sports executive, was the leader for organizing the Avon International Running Circuit.\(^{33}\) While the Avon Running Circuit helped to legitimize women’s running, the sport did not become an Olympic event until the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. In order for a sport to become an Olympic event, the event must be practiced in at least twenty-five countries on at least two continents. Created in 1978,\(^{34}\) Avon’s running circuit helped fulfill these requirements.\(^{35}\)

Another major achievement for competitive running was the addition of the women’s Olympic marathon event in 1984. However, the creation of the event took many years. Not only did medical arguments stand in the way of the event, but social barriers as well. According to Jamie Shultz in *Qualifying Times*, in order to fit with the existing cultural concepts of femininity, the women’s advisory board for the Olympics in 1961 called for the hindrance of women in sports.\(^{36}\)

Running challenged cultural concepts of beauty, even into the 1980s after the addition of the event. Medical concerns for female runners were addressed in 1979, when the American College of Sport’s Medicine released “Opinion on the Participation of Female Athletes in Long Distance Running.” The statement said, “females should not be denied the opportunity to compete in long-distance running. There exists no conclusive scientific or medical evidence that long-distance running is contraindicated for the healthy, trained female athlete.”\(^{37}\)

Another stepping stone for the Olympic marathon was *A Comprehensive Report on Women’s Long Distance Running* by Switzer in 1979. Published around the time of the first

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Avon Cosmetics International Running Circuit, the report argued for the inclusion of a women’s Olympic marathon competition. Women raced in the first women’s Olympic marathon at the 1984 summer Olympics in Los Angeles.\(^{38}\)

Throughout the course of the development and eventual creation of more women’s marathon competitions, standards of beauty shifted and changed. These changes resulted in expectations for women to combine athletics and femininity. However, beauty standards consistently changed throughout history, which made it difficult to combine athletics and beauty.

During the 1950s, and the Victorian age, trends idealized women with fuller bodies, rather than slimmer bodies.\(^{39}\) Exceptions existed, demonstrated by advertisements for so-called slimming styles of clothing, such as a 1958 ad for Chubbettes.\(^{40}\) Fitness and standards for beauty conflicted with each other, especially with running. As explained in *The Beauty Myth*, fat represented sexuality and desire\(^ {41}\) and the sport of running contradicted this idea. Through sexuality and desire, these traits catered to the male gaze and related to a woman’s ability to bear children. Traditional femininity related to these standards through the relationship to femininity and family promotion. One result of running is weight loss. While in the world of fashion by the late 1960s thinness was promoted and running aligns with this, the muscle build that was associated with running provided a different source of confliction. Another result of running is muscle build—a feature not always desired before the 1980s. During the shifts that occurred with general beauty standards, the fitness craze and leisure running rose as well. Throughout the growth of running, especially leisure running, beauty standards and its connection to fitness

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\(^{38}\) Lovett, *The Olympic Marathon*, 122

\(^{39}\) Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*. 184


raised more questions. Questions arose surrounding the beauty of women who had stronger muscles that came from running. Others questioned how running would challenge pre-existing beauty standards.

Beauty standards for women changed throughout history and showed different ideals for American women. However, ideals shifted during the 1960s as new fashion models like Twiggy, known for her small, thin body began to appear in the fashion world. Models interviewed in periodicals suggest changes towards a slenderer figure. For example, Jean Shrimpton was a such model interviewed in a 1965 issue of *Ladies Home Journal*. Shrimpton continued to show new ideal of a slender figure, stating that growing up as a thinner woman helped her to enter the fashion industry. Even though Shrimpton described herself as a tomboy growing up with her involvement in sports, she still maintained her thin body with little to no muscle mass.\(^{42}\) Not only did changes appear in fashion, but in other areas of popular culture. For example, the weights of Miss. America and Playboy Bunnies began to shrink throughout the 1960s.\(^{43}\) These groups existed in a public light in different mediums but followed similar patterns. The changes began to influence average women and girls. Two studies from 1966-1969 showed that the number of high school girls who thought they were fat rose from 50 percent to 80 percent.\(^{44}\) Despite the rise of more women turning towards a thinner body, muscle development became a more present source of concern. Arguments for a fuller female body still remained as well.

As leisure fitness rose during the late 1960s and 1970s, expectations for the majority of Americans to participate in exercise trends emerged. The trends continued well into the 1980s, as leisure exercise continued to rise. According to a *Time Magazine* article from 1981, “On any

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given day in the Republic [United States] this year, a record 70 million Americans—Almost half the adult population—will practice some form of corporeal self-betterment."\(^{45}\) During the late 1960s, the beginnings of these trends appeared throughout periodicals. These periodicals showed how people could participate in exercise.

Despite the rise of exercise participation, different distinctions and expectations still separated men and women. For example, *Look* magazine’s 1969 article, “Exercise for All Seasons,” showed women working out in so-called “graceful” or streamlined poses for exercises like aerobics classes. These ideal exercises for women centered towards sports that fit a more traditionally feminine look such as diving, gymnastics, and figure skating. According to Susan Cahn, sports such as these emphasized the beauty and grace of a sport. Sports like weightlifting, throwing, and running created so-called “bulky” muscles, that were considered unfeminine.\(^{46}\) Women were expected to maintain a grace and feminine aesthetic. Ideal sports emphasized an aesthetic side, instead of violent ones like rugby.\(^{47}\) The women in *Look* magazine also wore revealing leotards and tights which began to rise for the aerobic classes.\(^{48}\) As running for oneself rose in popularity, health professionals made sure to address different concerns regarding changes in the body during running.

Throughout the rise of women runners and athletes in general, major concerns about how to protect traditional femininity and beauty followed. Despite different arguments that existed to show that women runners would not lose their traditional beauty through feminine curves, running’s impact on beauty and the female figure remained as a prominent issue. Some

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\(^{45}\) Reed et. al. "America Shapes Up." 106.


\(^{47}\) Cahn, *Coming on Strong.* 218

arguments made by scholars regarding this issue revolved around a female athlete who had to prove her heterosexuality. Susan Cahn argued, “The most acceptable athletes were the women whose beauty and sex appeal "compensated" for their athletic ability.” Female runners were expected to maintain their sex appeal. The importance of a woman runner to remain sexually appealing to men took the form of how an athletic woman could still fulfill the male gaze. According to *Time Magazine*, “The new body is here, and men may decide it is sexy for one basic reason: it can enhance sex.” This argument continued through the article to address how this change allowed women to “give full range to their sex drive.” However, the main reason for the female athletic body was for men. Despite changes towards a thinner figure, emphasis on pleasing men and their needs still remained as an expectation. In regards to a woman’s body and how the influence of sports and athletics impacted a woman’s outward appearance, the concern in how a woman would maintain her femininity was an issue that many different arguments arose concerning it.

Even though women entered athletics more than before in the 1960s through the 1980s, expectations for women to maintain their feminine body remained. To some, concerning ideas about how a female athlete would take on traditionally masculine roles emerged. According to an article by *Time Magazine* in 1978, “What is considered healthy psychological development in a man—aggressiveness, independence, ambition, courage, competitiveness—was viewed as unhealthy in a woman.” In order to fit a traditional homemaker image presented by Evans, a

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49 Cahn, *Coming on Strong*. 183  
50 Reed et. al. "America Shapes Up."  
51 Reed et. al. "America Shapes Up."  
woman needed to remain passive and complacent. The rise of athletics and running contradicted these ideas and fears of a woman exhibiting traditionally masculine traits rose.

Regardless, some felt that so-called traditional feminine beauty would remain more important in society when compared to an athletic body. A 1982 *Time Magazine* article argued, “‘[t]here is a growing strength in women, but it’s in the forehead, not the forearm. Men will always be attracted to women with nice soft arms and a fleshy bosom.’”  

However, in the same *Time Magazine* article in 1982, the author argued for the acceptance of a more athletic female body. The athletic body showed that a woman cared about herself, and beauty was seen through “…the vibrancy of someone who’s got blood rushing through her body from exercise.” General acceptance of an athletic woman’s body rose in regards to keeping femininity through grace. In the same *Time* article in 1982 it praised the growing athleticism in many women, “It [female form] may be slimmer than before, but it is surely stronger. ‘…with exercise you get strength and grace. The strength makes you self-assured. The grace makes you more feminine.’”  

With the rise of leisure running for women, questions rose regarding how the sport would alter female beauty.

Running books utilized scientific evidence to counter and address beauty concerns that followed a runner’s body. *Women’s Running* by Dr. Joan Ullyot specifically addressed the physiology of muscles created by distance running. This address showed the concerns regarding women runners and their potential muscle build. According to *Women’s Running*, physiology and medical studies showed that women could increase their strength fifty to seventy percent without gaining concerning bulky muscles.  

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53 Reed et. al. "America Shapes Up."
54 Reed et. al. "America Shapes Up."
55 Reed et. al. "America Shapes Up."
reflected the fears of society of a woman losing her traditionally feminine body. Not only were muscles a place of concern, but there were other areas as well.

Another common concern and challenge to femininity was a women’s breasts sagging after the strain and constant bouncing that accompanied running. Again, running books address these concerns that running would alter the body parts. Ullyot explained:

Sagging breasts result usually from overdistention (with fat) which can stretch the skin and break elastic fibers in the subcutaneous fibers. Bouncing will not break these fibers (if it did, you’d see horizontal stretch marks above the breast, which you don’t.)

Despite this, following the invention of the commercial sports bra—known as the Jogbra—in 1977, the new concern was how to maintain a woman’s feminine shape while pressing down her breasts. Scholar Jamie Schulz argued, “Jogbra (1986) asserted that their ‘sports bra is scientifically designed to comfortably redistribute breast mass, … [lessening] the gravity pull that tears delicate breast tissue.’” The importance for a woman to maintain her femininity through breasts was a constant source of concern and questioning.

Society’s influence helped to reinforce old standards of beauty as well as corporate involvement. Corporations also helped with the commercialization of women’s running and fashion. The cosmetic company Bonne Bell, despite its sponsorship in women’s running, still helped to maintain certain aspects of femininity through its slogan, “Be fit, Look good.” The company pressed for corporate fitness and gave access to gyms and other workout facilities to its employees. Despite the corporate involvement, slogans like “Be Fit, Look Good,” helped to reinforce the message that women’s appearance mattered. While beauty standards in general

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57 Ullyot *Women’s Running.* 69-70
began to shift towards a more athletic body, the use of slogans like this emphasized the importance of a woman still maintaining her feminine beauty.

The corporate involvement in the development of more women’s distance running competitions also impacted the commercialization of running gear for women. As the 1970s moved into the 1980s, the so-called correct fashion for running rose in importance. To maintain this beauty, one needed to have beautiful outward appearance through clothing. In many of the running books, dedicated sections of what to wear while running appeared. Different kinds of clothing, according to the books, should be worn during running. Developments of new running clothing and fashion during the 1970s and 1980s appeared in the running books. The different publishing dates reflected the changes that the running clothing industry was experiencing. For example, *Women’s Running*, published in 1976, Dr. Ullyot described running shoes as the most important gear for a runner, rather than the clothing. However, compared to *The Beauty of Running*, published in 1980, Gayle Barron discussed the changing arguments of running clothing made by Ullyot. Barron addressed this shift a few years later, writing that “…one of the nicer effects of the running boom has been that clothing manufacturers have learned how to make quite fashionable running gear.” The majority of women runners fit the ideal consumer for sports companies in the 1970s, coming from mostly white and middle class backgrounds. According to a *Time Magazine* article from 1981, the Avon Sports Department was worth 5 million and sales for women-cut running shorts were projected to be one million dollars. As women entered the sport of running, corporations began to tailor their products for women, opening a new market for sales and a new consumer market.

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63 Reed et. al. "America Shapes Up."
Despite the consumer and corporate market working to influence women runners, growing feminist rhetoric worked to inspire other women to get out and run. However, the tone shifted in the 1970s towards a stronger tie to feminism and running. As women found a stronger connection to athletics they felt more empowered through running. For example, Kathrine Switzer said that the Boston Marathon in 1967 “radicalized” her. She explained that she had been oblivious to the athletic discrimination among women until the marathon. She argued that the Boston Marathon, “had occurred at a time when women across the country were beginning to feel the first psychological impact of feminism. They were questioning all areas of social limitation and bias, including athletes.” The questioning of society’s expectations for women continued into leisure running.

Feminist rhetoric as a means to push back against the social limitations against women athletes appears throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Women such as Kathrine Switzer found that running was another place to apply the ideas from second wave feminism. Women could use marathon running to show their connection to feminist ideals for strength and self-fulfillment. Kathrine Switzer stated: “Marathon running offered a glaring example in that women were, by the rules, barred from it. And if to officials we were the ‘fair’ sex, indeed they were the ‘unfair’ sex.” However, after the 1967 Boston Marathon, Switzer argued that the race was a catalyst to influence women to compete in distance running.

While running books addressed concerns regarding a woman maintaining her femininity, they still called for a woman to take charge of her health and fitness. In the opening paragraphs

65 Switzer. "OPINION: Equal Rights for Marathon Runners, Too."
67 Switzer, "OPINION: Equal Rights for Marathon Runners, Too."
of *Running for Health and Beauty: a Complete Guide for Women*, by Kathryn Lance, the author stated, “[y]ou have been cheated. Throughout your entire life, your family, your schools, society itself—all have systemically cheated you of one of your most fundamental rights: the right to a healthy, active body.”  

Many women who wrote running books like Ullyot and Lance included their own running journey in the beginning of the book. These stories, showed the so-called “If I Can Do it, So Can You” mentality. this mentality tried trying to inspire women that no matter what fitness level they possessed, they could start running.

Written in 1977, *Running for Health and Beauty* showed the benefits of running for women. Lance pointed out how previous fitness regimes for women could be performed around the house, utilizing home appliances or cleaning supplies. However, women in the 1970s participated in jobs and careers outside of the home, which resulted in changes in the way that women stayed fit.  

Despite some arguments for changing ways for women to be athletic, ways for a woman runner to confine to the family roles expected of her still existed. Women were expected to still fulfil their family roles and duties, while balancing these roles with running.

Along the same lines of maintaining roles for women in family roles, women runners also experienced backlash from men themselves. While there was a perceived threat to masculinity with women athletes, feminist rhetoric pushed back against arguments. Throughout running books, feminist rhetoric showed that women had the ability to run long distances. Many of the fitness running books published during the 1970s showed the rising feminist rhetoric of empowering women to take charge of their own health and fitness. This went along with the newly formed women’s running competitions, Switzer running the Boston marathon, and other

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strides made by women runners during the 1970s and 1980s. The running books addressed the different kinds of backlash a woman might get from men, and how they should address these comments. While women tried to combat the boundaries placed upon them with running directly, there were other ways for women to resist the pushback. Through sections in the running books like Women’s Running, women found ways to run, but simply ignored what Ullyot called, ‘unsolicited advice.’ Ullyot warned women of what men might yell out during a run, and how to process the advice. Women’s Running stated, “male joggers rarely receive such unsolicited advice for some reason…. I think that many ‘sidewalk coaches’ feel that because they are men, they naturally know more about running than women.”70 These kinds of methods did not necessarily try to combat the system or change the rules as upfront like running a marathon competition that barred women. Rather, these ways were more subtle and individual actions that still helped women get out and run.

While feminist rhetoric aimed to inspire women to join the running revolution, tensions still existed within women runners themselves. Throughout the 1960s and the 1980s, female runners still understood that they had a certain level of femininity they needed to maintain. For example, even after Kathrine Switzer successfully competed in the Boston Marathon in 1967, she made sure to address her femininity. At the time, she did not run the marathon initially to make a feminist statement or push back against the rules. She explained, “Gee, I didn’t know about those rules…but I think it’s time to change the rules. They are archaic. Women can run, and they can still be women and look like women…”71 Unprompted, Switzer explained how women could run and still maintain the importance of outward beauty. Even before the beginning shifts towards a more athletic body, Switzer addressed concerns that certain groups of

70 Ullyot. Women’s Running. 19
society felt, such as a woman emulating traditionally masculine traits. Switzer understood the importance of maintaining traditional femininity, a trend that continued throughout the 1960s into the 1980s.

Women found themselves looking for a balance between running and not stepping too far to threaten men’s roles. For example, a New Jersey housewife explained:

I started playing tennis while my husband still sat around…. By the time I was running, he was finally playing tennis. By the time he was jogging, I began Jazzercise. I finally found a way to compete physically with men that doesn't threaten them…. I feel that I am any man's equal now.72

Different media outlets assigned Kathrine Switzer traditional expectations of homemaking as well. After the creation of the Avon International Running circuit that she helped to design. In the New York Times, Switzer discussed that above her work, the most important question of her life was having children. By the time that Switzer gave the interview, she was in her thirties and had been married but, according to the article, her marriage was strained due to her job demands. The majority of the article discussed her home life, marriage, and possibility of having children.73 While she made large strides for women runners and the legitimization of running competitions, there was always the lingering traditional expectations for her to follow.

Like the myth of Atalanta, women runners defied expectations set before them, but limitations from certain expectations remained. Women joined in with the rise of leisure athletics, utilizing feminist rhetoric to help them gain equality with men. Similar rhetoric applied to distance running competitions. With the rise of the runner’s body, traditional expectations of femininity and female beauty changed and brought about new questions. Corporations managed

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72 Reed, J.D, Sue Raffety, and Christopher Redman. "America Shapes Up."
73 Lesley Visser and Amy Rennert. “Avon Exec Kathrine Switzer.”
to tap into the changing trends to help legitimize women’s running as a competition while still managing to utilize ideals of beauty in marketing campaigns.

American beauty standards constantly changed throughout history, and women challenged these standards. With the changes in beauty, participation of women in athletics shifted as well. Culminating with the addition of the women’s Olympic marathon race in 1984, women found more equal ground with men and running. Women consistently push the limits and challenge regulations placed upon them and reach far beyond the scope of politics. Women runners like Kathrine Switzer pushed the limits placed upon them and proved that “…women’s sports [was] not a fluke, that you’re not just watching a helluva race, you’re also watching a social and cultural revolution.”

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