White Women Smiling? Media Representations of Women at the 2018 Commonwealth Games

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In this article we analyze images of sportswomen from four media outlets over the course of the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games (Australia). Through visual discourse analysis we find that despite structural changes to increase gender equality at the Commonwealth Games – which for the first time ensured equal opportunities for men and women to win medals – sportswomen were still depicted in a very narrow way, and intersectional representations were mainly excluded. Though the quantity of images of women had increased, the 'quality' of these images – in terms of representing sportswomen in their diversity – was poor. We still have far to go if we are to embrace women in their multiplicity – and to recognize that women can be strong, capable, butch, femme, and varied in their range of expressions of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity.

Keywords: women, sport events, media representation, success, feminism

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The 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games (GC2018) were the first to offer equal medal opportunities to men and women as part of a broader strategic push by the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) to promote gender equality. In this article we analyze images of GC2018 sportswomen and associated headlines and captions in what we are calling “traditional” and “non-traditional” media outlets. At first glance, media coverage of GC2018 seemed to reflect the intended spirit of equality, with both traditional and non-traditional media including many images of sportswomen. We found that some media outlets did better than others at representing sportswomen, yet all embraced the image of “white women celebrating and smiling”. Despite the diversity of women from the Commonwealth competing in GC2018, our analysis concurred with Bruce’s (2016, p. 366) assessment that media depictions of sportswomen normalize and reinforce “ideals of White, middle-class femininity”. There were instances where these ideals were challenged, including through representations of loss, intense emotion and even anger, but overall, whiteness and normative femininity were presented as “natural” and “neutral”. As feminist scholars interested in sport, we call for coverage that dismantles colonial practices, encompasses greater diversity beyond heteronormativity, and white supremacy, and moves away from normative femininity to embrace sportswomens’ failure and loss, as well as intense emotion, as important “frames” for photojournalism and media professionals in sport and beyond.

Becoming Visible: Women and Sport

Women's movement into sport heralded optimistic predictions about the demise of inequalities between the sexes (Hargreaves, 1990). As Messner (1988, p.198) wrote, "women's movement into sport represents a genuine quest by women for equality, control of their own bodies, and self-definition, and as such it represents a challenge to the ideological basis of male domination". Yet despite numerous gains, with women now given access to almost all sports, and, in the case of GC2018, an equal number of medal events, media representations of sportswomen continue to adhere to normative, and potentially restrictive versions of femininity and fail to embrace the diversity and multiplicity of women.

Central to the ongoing marginalization of women in sport is an idealist notion of sport as apolitical; "as a realm of freedom divorced from material and historical constraints" (Messner, 1988, p. 198; McKay & Rowe, 1987). A quick glance at contemporary sport marketing and management journals illustrates that those researching in this area are accepting of idealistic notions of sport, with very little critical analysis of gender or race, which if included, are often considered merely a "variable". There are of course exceptions, such as the work of Shaw (with Frisby, 2006), Frisby (2005), Aitchinson (2005), Fullagar (with Flemming, 2007), and Hoeber (2007) (as well as a growing number of feminists making forays into sport management research). On the main however, those working in sport marketing and management continue to emphasize the promise and "good" of sport, rather than interrogate the inherent history and enduring issues of power. As McDonald (2002, p.379) writes, marketers "participate in and advance a representational politics", and the same can certainly be said of those working in the media. This is in stark contrast to the sociology of sport where critical and innovative theories and concepts are the staple and disciplinary boundaries are continually pushed. In this article, we bring concepts and theories from the sociology of sport to analyze the sports marketing and media industry as they produce, control and marketize images of sportswomen.

As noted by Messner (1988, p.200), “sport was a male-created homosocial cultural sphere that provided men with psychological separation from the perceived feminisation of society while also providing dramatic symbolic proof of the ‘natural superiority’ of men over women”, thus demonstrating the prevalence of hegemonic masculine media representations in sport (see also Kian, Vincent, & Mondello, 2008). In this respect, McKay and Rowe (1987) explain that Australian sports media history is embedded in legitimizing masculine hegemonies, capitalist rationalities and militaristic nationalism. This history is often ignored or unacknowledged by the sport industry, including print and news media outlets, and in sport management, and sport coaching contexts.

Despite women’s gains in sport, the coupling of sport and hegemonic masculinity is an enduring one (Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008; Kian, Vincent & Mondello, 2008). One of the ongoing consequences of this coupling are media portrayals of sportswomen that emphasize femininity over athletic competence. There have been numerous studies which have confirmed this (see Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008), and as Krane (2001, p.116) aptly observed, “highlighting the ‘feminine’ aspects of women’s sport presents female athletes as culturally acceptable women. Further, by emphasising the fun and camaraderie in female sport, promoters assure parents, athletes, and fans that sport is appropriate for girls and women”.

This is changing, in part enabled via social media, and the power digital platforms give sportswomen to present *themselves* as they wish (Bruce, 2016). Bruce (2016) outlined 15 rules summarising the depiction of sportswomen in the media: five older rules, four persistent rules, four current rules, and two new rules. Bruce (2016) described infantilization of female sportswomen as an example of an old rule, along with the tendency to provide non-sport related commentary that focuses more on sportswomen's personal lives and appearance than their athletic performance. Persistent rules identified by Bruce (2016, p.10) included sexualization of sportswomen, as well as "compulsory heterosexuality and appropriate femininity", whereby the media have expressed a preference for reporting on heterosexual women and emphasizing physical and emotional characteristics that conform to white, middle-class ideals of femininity. Among the current rules identified by Bruce (2016), sportswomen have been increasingly portrayed in the media in action, and as serious athletes. However, it is through the final two new rules that sportswomen have been given most agency to influence their portrayal, which Bruce (2016) attributes to the rise of the Internet. Bruce (2016, p.369) labelled these new rules "our voices" and "pretty and powerful", reflecting how the Internet has enabled contemporary sportswomen to exercise greater control in presenting "their own sporting truths", as well as embracing femininity and physical competence as complimentary. As Bruce (2016) notes, "contradictory discourses play out in a increasingly globalised and unbounded media landscape", where old rules exist alongside new rules where sportswomen are given agency to be both "pretty *and* powerful" (p.372, original emphasis).

Bruce situates the context for sportswomen's agency to be both pretty and powerful within third-wave feminist thinking that strives to be, "antiessentialist and nonjudgemental, welcoming a variety of identities both across and within people" (Cocca, 2014, p.98). Third-wave feminists, including scholars such as Heywood (2012), identify sports as a site of "stealth feminism", where women can embrace strength, aggression and high-level athleticism while still being perceived as feminine. However, despite this potential of sport to enable feminist goals, whiteness and heteronormativity continue to be defining features of the most popular sportswomen (see McDonald, 2002; McDonald, 2005; Bruce, 2016; Ratna, 2018).

The prevalence of whiteness and heteronormativity in representations of sportswomen reflects societal inequalities and colonial practices that position black women and women of color as outsiders, invisible, deviant and subaltern (Hooks, 1992; McDonald 2005; Cardoso Brown, 2017; Ratna, 2017; Ratna, 2018). Thus, the emphasis on the representation of sportswomen as traditionally feminine and beautiful, is intimately and structurally tied to whiteness and heterosexuality (Cooky et al., 2010; McDonald, 2002). Sportswomen of color continue to be represented in mainstream media as sanitised, homogenous and grotesque, and within highly scrutinising frames, which reflects the prevalence of racism and sexism in sportswomen's representations (Hobson 2003; Cooky et al., 2010; Ratna 2018). Ratna (2018, p.200) illustrates this point with the example of the Williams sisters (see also Douglas, 2012):

> The sisters' re/presentation it seems only works in this context to further bolster the image of elite, White, Western, heterosexy and able-bodied players. Arguably, we may never know 'who' African American women are, whether as elite athletes or as recreational sports enthusiasts. Their complex, dynamic and multifarious engagements with sport and physical activity, and the experiential affect of contingent inclusions/exclusions, are rendered invisible.

Therefore, the freedoms and choices that sportswomen are gaining in the sport realm, including around their representation, need to be critically understood along the axis of race and the continuity of coloniality (Ratna, 2017; Ratna, 2018; Toffoleti, Palmer, & Samie, 2018).

A recent short commentary by Cooky and Antunovic (2018), noted that liberal feminist narratives of progress, *and* critical feminist narratives that call out sexism, racism, and other forms of exclusion are beginning to influence reporting of women in sport. Although this is the case, this article goes on to demonstrate, and support Cooky and Antunovic's (2018) comment, that this increased visibility requires further theorising of the relations between representation, discourses and the markets.

Neoliberalism, Feminisms, and Sporting Success

In many areas of life women (and girls) are "succeeding". In education, the successes of young women are frequently highlighted, and in the workplace, women are increasing their participation, and the paygap is lessening (though not disappearing). McRobbie's (2007, p.718) articulation of the "top girl" has been central to our understanding of the ways governments (in her case, the UK) are positioning women and girls as already having achieved equality, and are hence filled with capacity for success and achievement in sex, work and consumerism. These "top girls" are in juxtaposition to the "global girl" factory worker, or the "at-risk" girl (Harris, 2004, p.13), and the impoverishment of many women and girls in the Global South. Sportswomen too, are "top girls", where increasing access to a range of sporting events and practices, has led to discourses of equality and parity with men's sport, despite inequalities persisting in relation to access and more centrally, visibility for some women. As Gerodetti and McNaught-Davis (2007, p.3) note, "in a neoliberal discourse those who are not successful are portrayed as 'failures' as a consequence of individual choice or insufficient effort".

In sport, as in many spheres, gender mainstreaming has become the norm. Whereby autonomous (and varied) feminist groups were previously the ones agitating for change and demanding equality, gender equality is now officially endorsed and, as some say, co-opted by institutions' policies (Squires, 2007). The Commonwealth Games Federation is a prime example, where gender equality is officially endorsed, and even heralded as core to their organisation and relevance. This is indeed a success of feminism, however this “success” should not be reason for the abandonment of important debates in feminist theory and practice, particularly concerning women who do not fit the ideal of the “top girl” (McRobbie, 2007). For example, Petty and Pope’s (2018) analysis of media coverage of the England national team competing in the 2015 FIFA Women’s World Cup suggested a positive shift in the quantity of coverage gained by women’s sport in England. However, their analysis overlooked the lack of coverage celebrating the multitude of dimensions of sportswomens’ identities.

Key to this current article is the increasing participation and “successes” of women in sport that can be read within the context of post-feminism and neoliberalism. In the fields of work and education, class is by far the most reliable indicator to “success” (Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001). However, in sport, while class plays an important part, race and sexuality are perhaps more telling. In many ways, women’s successes in sport can be understood through Berlant’s (2011, p.1) conceptualisation of “cruel optimism”, where she writes, “a relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing”. Women’s desire for sporting success often comes at a price; risk of injury, loss of income, feelings of loss, sexual harassment and explicit and implicit sexism. Women, in their multiplicity, push their bodies to get to the elite level to participate on the world stage at events like the Olympics or the Commonwealth Games. These women, many of whom are from small Island nations in the developing world, in the case of the Commonwealth Games, are engaged in a relation of cruel optimism, where, despite their efforts, they remain invisible because they do not adhere to normative notions of femininity.

As feminists interested in sport we are committed to disentangling those relations of cruel optimism, despite the risks of being thought of as “killjoys” (Ahmed, 2010, p.591). Yes, access for women has increased. Yes, women have equal opportunities to win medals at events such as the Commonwealth Games. Yes, media coverage has certainly improved in the quantity of images of sportswomen. But we still have far to go if we are to embrace women in their multiplicity – and to recognise that women can be strong, powerful, capable, butch, femme, and varied in their range of expressions of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity. Because femininity is historically and geographically bound, and "acceptable" femininity is often perceived differently on the basis of class (Skeggs, 1997), race (Chow, 1999) and sexual orientation (Volcano & Dahl, 2008), media representations of sportswomen matters in terms of who is "allowed" to be visible. Equality for women in sport is about more than consumer success, or opportunities to "choose" how to present their bodies (though this is welcome). Sportswomen come from a range of countries of origin, have different sexualities, and gender expressions, and, importantly, their losses and wins have intense affects that matter. We argue sport and sport events such as the Commonwealth Games, have the potential to provide a platform for diverse representations of sportswomen and their successes (and failures), that transcend myopic portrayals of white women smiling.

Commonwealth Games: Embracing Diversity and Gender Equality?

The Commonwealth Games are a quadrennial multi-sport event for members of the world's oldest political association of states; The Commonwealth (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2018). While many member countries still have connections to the British Empire, it is no longer an eligibility criterion for membership to the Commonwealth. Instead, membership is now underpinned by "equal voluntary cooperation" (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2018, n.p.) and the multifarious Commonwealth aims to connect 53 countries and 2.4 billion people with shared goals of development, democracy and peace (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2017). Of relevance to this paper, gender equality and the empowerment of women have been integral considerations in recent projects undertaken by the Commonwealth Secretariat (2017).

The Commonwealth's flagship sport event, the Commonwealth Games (hereafter the "Games") is overseen by the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) (2015), which claims that its core values are humanity, equality, and destiny. Echoing the aspirations of the Commonwealth Secretariat, gender equality is claimed as a central component of the CGF's commitment to fairness and inclusion. Indeed, as mentioned, GC2018 were the first Games with gender parity in the number of medal events for men and women (CGF, 2018a) and the CGF's commitment to nondiscrimination is now enshrined in all its host city contracts. Moreover, the CGF recognises the media as critical in its efforts to improve gender equality in the Games and their coverage. CGF Vice President, Bruce Robertson (2018, n.p.) expressed his hope that when the Games receives media coverage, that women's "portrayal will be equivalent to men in placement, prominence, language and tone, narratives, and imagery". An advisory group was created for GC2018 "to create a Gender Equality Style Guide that could be referenced by broadcast commentators and media" (Robertson, 2018, n.p.), signifying the CGF's strong strategic commitment to championing gender equality through the Games.

While the CFG has an official commitment to equality, the Games have a colonial history. The Games endorse "imperial prestige" (Fuller, 2018, n.p.) through nomenclature that connects to their imperial past (i.e., the Commonwealth Games and Queen's Baton Relay), as well as through the overshadowing by organizers, sponsors and Australian mainstream media of the implications of running GC2018 on stolen land. During the Games, nationalism, the Gold Coast's transformation for the event and its beach culture were celebrated, while the complex and violent colonial history of Australia were ignored. Indigenous and ally resistance renamed the event the "Stolenwealth Games" and in the lead up and throughout the Games, organized several protests and workshops to educate local and global audiences about Australia's unresolved issues with its colonial history (see Fuller, 2018). The vexed nature of Australia's history with the Commonwealth (as just one example among the Commonwealth nations) highlights tension with the CGF's lofty ideal of equality. This includes gender equality, as patriarchy and misogyny are deeply implicated in the colonialism that persists in Commonwealth nations including Australia (see Moreton-Robinson, 2000).

Gender Equality in the "Relevance" Debate

The Commonwealth Games have been described as second only to the Olympic Games regarding number of competing countries, athletes, and range of sports involved (Lockstone & Baum, 2009). Its most recent iteration, GC2018, attracted over 6,500 athletes and team officials from 71 nations and territories (Commonwealth Games Corporation, 2018). Yet, in the crowded sport event marketplace, the relevance (Brown, 2010; O'Connor, 2013) and sustainability (Kidd, 2011) of the Commonwealth Games have been continually questioned. The CGF (2018b, n.p.) addresses the question of the Games' ongoing relevance directly on its website. It claims the Games are "more relevant than ever before", with an active role in contributing to peace, prosperity, and sustainability across Commonwealth member nations (CGF, 2018b, n.p). Significantly, the CGF positions its commitment to gender equality as a justification for the Games' contemporary relevance, alongside the socio-geographic scope of the Commonwealth (which reaches over one third of the world's population, 60 percent of whom are 30 years of age or under and includes small, large, wealthy and developing nations).

However, recent research into the outcomes of major sport events has reiterated that hosting such events does not automatically guarantee the production of social benefits, or concretely satisfy the raft of lofty aspirations touted by event organisers and host governments (for example, Ramchandani, Davies, Coleman, Shibli & Bingham, 2015). Instead, there is a growing understanding that for events to deliver positive outcomes, it is first necessary for event stakeholders to devise and implement strategies aimed at capitalising fully on the opportunities available (Chalip, 2014). Therefore, while the CGF have made inroads into improving gender equality around the Games, it is worth examining how their strategic stance translates into practice "at the coal face", to inform ongoing performance in this space. Hence the purpose of this research was to move beyond "face value" and analyse images to try and illuminate the discourses that dominated, or even surprised, over the course of the Games.

Methods

As scholars based on the Gold Coast during GC2018 we were in a unique position to reflect on the images presented in the media (television and print), and specifically what was "missing" from these images. As a collaborative feminist research team we share a common interest in gender equity, but from diverse perspectives. The first author has a background in feminist sport sociology and women's participation in contact sport (see for example, Pavlidis, 2012). The second author's work focuses on sport event stakeholders, management, and impacts (for example Kennelly, Corbett & Toohey, 2017), while the third author's research has focused on feminist decoloniality and participatory praxis with rural women in Colombia (see for example, Rodriguez Castro 2017).

As a multi-disciplinary team we utilised the methodology of visual discourse analysis to analyse data from news sources covering GC2018. This methodology pays attention to the notion of discourse as articulated by various kinds of images and text (Rose, 2001). We were interested in how stories, as told by images and text, construct understandings of the social world (Rose, 2001), particularly of sportswomen. Thus, we focused our attention on the discourses created by the combination of photograph, caption and headline in each of the news stories in our sample. Our interest was mediated or "seen through" our own positionalities and gaze as feminist researchers concerned with intersectionality, reflexivity, and anti-racism, and our privileged identities as middle-class white (Pavlidis and Kennelly), and white passing Latina women (Rodriguez Castro) (see van Ingen, 2013).

In contrast to content analysis that seeks latent and quantitative "truths" (Leewen & Jewitt, 2001), visual discourse analysis delves into questions of power, which in Foucauldian theory is understood as central to the influence of discourse in constructing the social world. Rose (2001, p.126) contends that "any discourse analysis should acknowledge that its language is constructing an interpretation rather than revealing the truth". We take a feminist lens to the analysis of the data to understand how intersectional inequalities and colonialism play out in sportswomen's representation in the media (Ratna, 2017). Moreover, by giving priority to the visual data we seek to explore embodiment in-depth, through deeply reflecting on how sportswomen's bodies are represented in the sports space, which has been demonstrated to be an asset of doing visual research (see Pink, 2007). In addition, the focus on a variety of media outlets with distinct political agendas, readerships, and geographical foci allows the paper to question the power the media has in shaping representations of women and traditionally marginalised communities (see Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery, 2013).

Practically, we followed Rose's (2001) steps for doing visual discourse analysis, which involved immersion in the data, identification of key themes from the sources, examination of the effects on the construction of "truth", and engagement with tensions, contradictions, details, the visible and the invisible. After immersion in the data, we identified key themes that involved embodiment (the ways the body is positioned, i.e., passive, active, emotion, etc.) and intersectionality (i.e., race, sexuality, gender). We also paid particular attention to details such as objects and symbols, poses and sport representation. Then, we focused on exploring the tensions and contradictions of the different discourses created by the "whole story" (caption, image, headline), in contrast to just the image itself. In doing this, we also questioned how discourses aimed to persuade the viewer of certain "truths" about the Commonwealth Games "spirit", the sports and the athletes. Finally, we engaged in a critical dialogue embedded in feminist reflexivity (Finlay, 2002) about what remains invisible or silent in the discourses that construct the figure of the "successful sportswoman" (see McRobbie, 2007; van Ingen, 2013). By exploring what was not visible, the gaps, and the silences we identified intersectional inequalities that persist in the historying and storying of sportswomen, which are deeply embedded in colonialism (see Pink, 2012; van Ingen, 2013, Ratna, 2017).

This article draws data from four different Australian media outlets, which were *Guardian Australia* (national, print and online), *The Australian* (national, print), *Gold Coast Bulletin* (local, print) and *The Village Source* (local, print). The decisions of sampling were based on creating an understanding of the similarities and differences between the reporting of "traditional media" (i.e., *Gold Coast Bulletin* and *The Australian*) and "non-traditional media" (i.e., *Guardian Australia* and *The Village Source*). Access to *The Village Source* was gained through Griffith University journalism staff and this paper, along with Guardian Australia, were included as alternatives to the Murdoch and Fairfax papers that form a duopoly in the Australian media landscape (Dwyer, 2013). Additionally, through these outlets we were able to look at both local and national reporting of GC2018. Data collection and sampling involved a total of 82 images. We collected data from the front page and/or first page featuring GC2018 coverage every day during GC2018, including reporting of the days pre- and post-games for *The Village Source*, which was published every two days. Table 1 records information on sampling. The media outlets varied in their reporting of GC2018, and publication frequency (i.e., specifically *The Village Source*), thus the number of images collected differed.

[*Insert Table 1*]

Findings and Discussion

The dominant themes arising from our analysis were "success and winning", and "the prevalence of whiteness", which are discussed in the ensuing section together due to their interconnected nature. Put simply, the majority of images analysed depicted successful and celebrating white women, particularly swimmers. Our analysis also identified a small number of images depicting loss, failure and pain and we discuss the significance of this alternative portrayal of sportswomen below. First however, we provide an overview of the newspaper coverage analysed as context for interpreting our findings.

Overview of Images

The prominence, quantity and diversity of coverage GC2018 and sportswomen received from the four media outlets varied. For the duration of the Games, GC2018 was the preeminent topic covered in the *Gold Coast Bulletin*, which is to be expected as the official newspaper of GC2018. During Games time, images of sportswomen dominated this outlet's front page (they featured on all but three of its covers). Swimmers were the most common sportswomen depicted, although the *Bulletin*'s cover also featured athletes from weightlifting, triathlon, boxing and cycling. In contrast the coverage the event received in *The Australian* was less ubiquitous: GC2018 made the front cover on five occasions but was generally reported on pages three or five. *The Australian*'s coverage of sportswomen (meeting our sampling criteria) was restricted to swimmers and divers.

In the non-traditional media, the *Guardian Australia* (print) featured limited GC2018 news, although more extensive reporting was available online. Images of sportswomen from netball and swimming dominated, although online this outlet also featured images of female cyclists, weightlifters, and track and field athletes. Finally, *The Village Source* was a dedicated GC2018 publication and included images of sportswomen from swimming, netball, triathlon, weightlifting, rugby and several track and field disciplines (i.e., javelin, hammer, and athletics). In addition, several images in our sample depicted sportswomen during opening and closing ceremonies where athletes were not distinguishable by sport.

Successful Sportswomen: The Prevalence of Whiteness and Traditional Femininity

The majority of images of sportswomen included in this analysis captured moments of success and celebration: most images were of medal winners. These images epitomized familiar ways of depicting winners: athletes were typically smiling, at times holding their arms up in victory, hugging teammates or fellow competitors, wearing medals, or waving their national flag. They were also predominantly white.

In the traditional media, the majority of images of sportswomen celebrating success were of white swimmers. Indeed, images from *The Australian* pertinent to this theme *only* featured white swimmers. For example, on the 12th April 2018, both the *Gold Coast Bulletin* and *The*

Australian published the same image of five female swimmers in their Australian team uniforms standing on the beach displaying their medals (a combined total of 14 medals are visible). The photo is posed and passive – the swimmers stand with their arms around each other's shoulders, smiling and laughing at each other in a congenial manner. Overall, this depiction of successful female swimmers may be interpreted as familiar and comfortable – the athletes are toned but not overtly muscular, wholesome, cheerful, and adhere to traditional notions of femininity. Indeed, while they are clearly “serious athletes” (Bruce, 2016, p.11) with their athletic competence on display (via their medals), the way these sportswomen are depicted exemplified Krane’s (2001, p.116) description of “culturally acceptable women”, who conform to white, middle-class ideals of femininity (Bruce, 2016) and Commonwealth citizenship and sovereignty (see Moreton-Robinson 2000). Further, such depictions of successful sportswomen in the traditional media illustrate that in heteronormative spaces, such as sport, traditional femininity remains a desired marker of successful women (Krane, 2001; McRobbie, 2007).

In contrast to the dominant representation of successful sportswomen smiling passively, the weightlifter Tia-Clair Toomey was depicted on the front page of the *Gold Coast Bulletin* (7th April, 2018) celebrating her victory by flexing her muscular upper body with an aggressive and triumphant facial expression. The photograph of Toomey emphasizes female muscularity and a sense of raw aggression/passion. This image contrasted with how Toomey was depicted in *The Village Source* the following day (8th April 2018) at her medal ceremony, where she posed smiling and dispassionate, holding up a Games mascot soft toy.

Of the other images of celebration and success, only two others depicted sportswomen not smiling. One was of South African Caster Semenya in *The Guardian Australia* (online, 10th April, 2018), who won gold in the 1500m. Semenya was depicted with an inscrutable expression and her arms raised in an unusual victory salute. Another was victorious English heptathlete Katarina Johnson-Thompson (Guardian Australia, online, 13th April, 2018) who stood applauding the audience with an expression of perhaps exhaustion. It is worth questioning why some female athletes are [depicted] smiling, and others not – particularly as the non-smiling athletes in our analysis included an athlete in a sport that contradicts traditional understandings of femininity (weightlifting), and an athlete whose gender/femininity has been very publicly scrutinised (Semenya). Athletes like Semenya are thus othered from the "successful sportswomen". Her body is represented as deviant, demonstrating how women of color are "viewed as existing outside of the realm of emphasised femininity that is tied to whiteness" (Cardoso Brown, 2017, p. 489; see also Hobson, 2003; McDonald, 2002; Ratna, 2018). McDonald (2002, p.388) notes that black women are usually depicted as "fatal women", "chaotic, emotional, and impulsive", yet representations of Caster Semenya do not adhere to this trend as intersectional marginalizations tied to heteronormativity emerge. The media does not cast her as a "fatal woman", and in many instances the media perpetuates misconceptions and gives voice to those who challenge Semenya's gender identity as a woman (see for example, Ziegler, 2019). Instead, in the media analysed, Semenya is cast as "blank", "emotionless", "hyper-masuline" and truly othered – echoing studies that have argued that the sporting bodies of women of color "are deemed as existing beyond socially constructed normative definitions" (Cardoso Brown, 2017, p. 491).

It was evident in our analysis that despite the commitment of GC2018 organisers to be inclusive of sportswomen, the media outlets analyzed largely failed in representing sportswomen's intersectional identities by privileging whiteness and traditional femininity. Across the analysis of images, captions and headlines, there was a recurrent representation of successful sportswomen as predominantly able bodied, young, white, and conforming mostly to traditional understandings of femininity (i.e., smiling, heterosexual, in passive poses, wearing makeup and jewelry). Thus, we now examine this "ideal" representation of sportswomen with a focus on race and gender expression, which were the primary intersectional aspects recurrent in our analysis.

The discourses analysed in *The Australian* and the *Gold Coast Bulletin* did not include any individual representation of sportswomen of color in *any* of the featured images. Indeed, only a few women of color were visible (indistinctly) in a group photograph from the Opening Ceremony printed in the *Gold Coast Bulletin*. This is despite the diversity of ethnic and racial backgrounds represented across the Commonwealth, and even within the Australian national team (Commonwealth Games Australia, 2018). By excluding women of color in their images, these media outlets are constructing a cultural imaginary in which women of color, especially black women are non-existent (see Hooks, 1992). This finding aligns to the black feminist literature that has argued that "the black female body is often marked as deviant and the black woman is viewed as an outsider" (Cardoso Brown, 2017, p. 487; see also Hobson, 2003). In addition, it reflects the cultural imaginaries of Australian popular culture and nationhood, including around the Commonwealth Games, which continue to be embedded in racism and colonial logics (for a contemporary example, Seo, 2018; Fuller, 2018). Indeed, the prevalence of whiteness in the traditional media reporting of the Australian team is a clear marker of what subjects are deemed visible and sovereign in the construction of the "modern Australian nation" (see Moreton-Robinson 2015).

On the other hand, *The Village Source* and the *Guardian Australia* did portray women of color. For example, images from non-traditional media included sportswomen of color from

Trinidad and Tobago (Guardian Australia, online, 9th April, 2018), South Africa (Guardian Australia, online, 10th April), England (Guardian Australia, online, 12th April and 13th April), the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu (The Village Source, 14th April, 2018). The *Guardian Australia* was the most inclusive media outlet in terms of representation of women of color, which speaks to the importance of non-traditional media in contesting racist practices in traditional media. However, the media outlets still privileged the representation of white feminine bodies. For instance, while *The Village Source* did portray women of color, they were typically depicted in pairs or group settings, which can be problematic in contributing to the homogenization of women of color by othering their bodies as one (Cardoso Brown, 2017; Hobson, 2003). That said, *The Village Source* portrayed less constructed and stereotypical discourses about black women by showing the athletes "everyday experiences" inside the Athletes' Village. For instance, in Figure 1, "Team Nigeria come together for a selfie in the Village" (The Village Source, 5th April, 2018).

[Insert Figure 1]

This image in some ways challenges the hierarchical identities noted by McDonald (2002), in particular the "good white girl"/the "fatal black woman". McDonald (2002, p.381) writes, "each part of these binary coupling relies on the other for its meanings and authority". The discourse in Figure 1 contests constructions of black women as chaotic or deviant, and black women's bodies as inherently masculine (Cardoso Brown, 2017; Hobson, 2003) and instead demonstrates the ways these athletes communicate their selves and articulate a sense of connection to others (Hess, 2015). Yet in troubling the good white girl/fatal black woman binary, their skill and strength as world class athletes have been arguably minimized, in favor of a less threatening self-presentation. Figure 1 also speaks to the importance of being inclusive of disabled bodies in sport, which are often invisible, although social media has been one way of countering this invisibility (Toffoletti, 2018). This was the only image in our analysis that depicted a wheelchair, although it is unclear whether the woman using it is a para-athlete or part of Team Nigeria's entourage.

A final facet to this theme, is that despite the privileging of smiling, white, and traditionally feminine women, even these athletes did not escape the "old [media] rule" (Bruce, 2016) of presenting sportswomen's achievements encased in non-sport related commentary. For example, the caption for the abovementioned *Gold Coast Bulletin* photograph of weightlifter Toomey (7th April), described her victory as stunning and heroic, given that just eleven days prior the athlete's cousin was killed in a car accident. This caption is one of several alluding to sportswomens' personal stories and describing their victories as "inspired" by tragic or fortuitous circumstances. On 14th April 2018, the *Gold Coast Bulletin* featured boxer Skye Nicolson, with a caption describing how she was "poised for one of Australian sport's great fairytale moments after winning her boxing semi-final in memory of the two brothers she never met" (both of whom were killed in a car accident). While Nicholson is depicted in action (conforming to Bruce's (2016) "current rules" for media portrayal of sportswomen), the commentary is non-sport related. While our analysis did not capture the narratives associated with male athletes, it is noted that for some successful women, the backstory provided seemed to explain or justify their success, potentially overlooking their athleticism, commitment to intense physical training and their choice to invest in becoming elite athletes. This finding resonates with other studies that have found that sportswomen's representations in the media have a strong focus on women's personal stories rather than on their athleticism (Carter, Casanova, & Maume, 2015; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008).

In sum, the most prevalent discourse in the images of sportswomen analyzed was one of winning, success and celebration, and most images depicted smiling white sportswomen who conformed to traditional notions of femininity. While it is positive that sportswomen dominated the front cover of the *Gold Coast Bulletin* for the duration of the Games, the "old rules" (Bruce, 2016) underpinning media portrayal of sportswomen were still strongly evident. The exceptions to these trends highlight that non-traditional media have a significant role to play in advancing more diverse portrayals of sportswomen.

In our analysis we are not attempting to criticize femininity as a non-desirable aspect of sportswomen. However, what these discourses evidence is that there continues to be a representation of sportswomen in which heteronormative femininity and whiteness are privileged over athletic competence, and intersectional representations. Moreover, the above examples illustrate how the marginalization of women who do not neatly fit the ideal of "top girls" in sport continues and is implicated in colonial histories that persist (McRobbie, 2007; Ratna, 2017).

'White women losing?' Representing loss and affectivity

As described in the previous section, most of the images we analyzed emphasized white women winning and celebrating. In noticeable contrast, of the 82 images analyzed only four images represented loss or losing, yet again, all four images were of white women. The four images were published by *The Australian* (1) and *Guardian Australia* (online and print) (3). The *Gold Coast Bulletin* and *The Village Source* did not publish any images that fit our selection criteria, representing women's loss or women losing over the course of the Commonwealth Games. Although not the most common discourse found, we argue that representing sportswomen's losses is one piece of the puzzle in inclusive media representation. Sport is about winning *and* losing. As consumers and producers of information about sportswomen, if we continue to emphasize success only, we deny sportswomen this important affective experience and risk trivializing the consequences of their participation in elite sport (i.e., loss, disappointment, injury, etc.). This may also be the case for sportsmen, where an overemphasis on winning has created cultures of cheating, toxic masculinity and dysfunction (see Kian, Vincent, & Mondello, 2008). We make this point as feminist academics interested in sport, who are engaged in ongoing reflexive conversation amongst ourselves and with other colleagues about our role in the production and interpretation of knowledge, not as athletes or sport practitioners.

Three of the images of loss were powerful, while one was baffling. The latter was published by *The Australian* on April 4, the first day of the 2018 Games. The image could be described as another representation of a "white woman smiling", yet the headline, "Games over: Tameka dives into retirement", signifies a different context. The image features diver Tameka Kovchenko, one of Australia's medal hopes. She poses on a diveboard, seated "side on", with her torso facing the front, and one arm resting passively on her front thigh. She is wearing a light green swim suit with slim straps. Her hair is pulled back tight and smooth, her complexion is clear, and she is calmly smiling. This image, neat, clear eyed, non-threatening, positive even, is at clear odds with the headline, and caption, which explains that, Kovchenko "has been forced to withdraw from the Commonwealth Games because of medical concerns". The image portrays the archetypal 'good white girl' (McDonald, 2002), yet the story focuses on the heartache of a career ending spinal condition. The disjointedness of headline and image raise questions regarding editorial choices and underlying beliefs about women in sport (see Carter, Casanova, & Maume 2015; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008), including the view that excessive exertion in competitive sport could be dangerous to "white female bodies" (McDonald, 2002). The selected image suggests that along with temptation to promote "scandal" and personal stories over athleticism, there is discomfort with deviating from "ideals of White, middle-class femininity" (Bruce, 2016, p.366) in selecting and depicting newsworthy sportswomen.

The second image of loss again involved an athlete suffering a career ending injury, with the headline, "Weightlifter Laurel Hubbard's career ended by injury at Commonwealth Games" (April 10, Guardian Australia online). The image shows Hubbard, a transgender athlete whose participation in GC2018 had attracted both supportive and discriminatory commentary (Ewart, 2018), in an active pose, dropping the bar in anguish as she succumbs to an arm injury. As a transgender athlete, Hubbard does not conform to ideals of heteronormative femininity, and indeed challenges "narratives that create, mark, and place bodies into hierarchies" such as the binary constructs of "man versus woman, heterosexual versus homosexual, masculinity versus femininity, and normal versus deviant" (McDonald, 2002, p.381). The choice of image chosen by the media, "as purveyors of meaning-making" (McDonald, 2002, p.381) is arguably significant. Although the image shows the sportswoman "in action", it is not an image of strength and power, but instead displays a moment of failure, and a complex range of affective discourses around difference, loss and pain in sportswomen's representations that remain under-interrogated.

On April 16, the final day of GC2018, two images were published in the *Guardian Australia*, representing the affective discourse of loss. The first image had the headline, "Australia hit 80 golds despite late upsets as Commonwealth Games conclude", with its caption explaining, "New Zealand's rugby sevens players celebrate extra-time upset of Australia". The image chosen for this story captures the end of the women's rugby sevens final. A dejected

Australian woman stands, hands on hips, head tilted upwards, eyes closed, face visibly upset. To her right are two New Zealand players, one laying on the grass, arm above her head, and the other jumping over/on top of her, a big smile on her face as she goes to celebrate with her teammate. The final image (Figure 2) had the headline, "Diamonds lose sparkle as world netball's duocracy is shaken up", with a caption reading, "A dejected Diamonds team at full-time after losing the gold-medal match in the last second". This image shows with clarity the intense despair and dejection of the sweaty and exhausted Australian netballers after losing to England.

[Insert Figure 2]

While some of these images may disrupt the dominant discourse of 'white women *smiling*', they continue the prevalence of whiteness, which arguably others, demonizes or makes invisible any affective responses of sportswomen of color and black women, whether winning or losing. As McDonald (2002, p. 381) notes, 'whiteness' carries "genuine consequences related to opportunity, status, and lifestyle". Even in relation to loss, there are intersectional inequalities, with editorial choices largely privileging white middle-class ideals of femininity and narrow ideals of Commonwealth citizenship and sovereignty (see Pink, 2012; van Ingen, 2013, Ratna, 2017).

Conclusion and Implications

GC2018 were the first Games with gender parity in the number of medal events for men and women. This provided a unique opportunity for event organisers and media outlets to demonstrate their commitment to gender equality, as old excuses about the disproportionate number of events for men and women no longer held. Through an analysis of images of sportswomen in four Australian media outlets, the *Guardian Australia, The Australian,* the *Gold Coast Bulletin,* and *The Village Source,* we found there was substantial positive coverage of sportswomen, echoing the findings of Petty and Pope (2018) in relation to the 2015 Women's FIFA World Cup. While the 'quantity' of coverage for sportswomen was positive, we found a broad lack of diversity in respect to images printed. Drilling down into the data, *The Australian* and the *Gold Coast Bulletin* favored a discourse that celebrated "white women smiling", exclusive of other, more diverse representations of women. In contrast to the traditional media, the *Guardian Australia* and *The Village Source* demonstrated some diversity in moving beyond discourses that constrict understandings of sportswomen as white, and embodying "feminine" traits such as fairness, kindness, and cooperation. While these alternative discourses represent a step in a positive direction, there is much terrain still to cover in how sportswomen are presented.

Visual discourse analysis provided a unique lens from which to collect and analyze sportswomen's representation at the GC2018, adding richness to discourse analysis, which focuses on language only (Norris, 2002). The images collected provided a range of perspectives for us, as a multi-disciplinary collaboration with strengths in feminist theory, race and decoloniality, and sport event management, to reflect upon. As a team we "read" these images together and considered their similarities and differences, and, importantly, what was not seen or missing from the data. As with all research, there were limitations, particularly with our interpretation of images based on subjective concepts such as normative/traditional femininity. However, by working as a multi-disciplinary team we have hopefully provided a nuanced perspective of the GC2018 media coverage that considers both social, cultural and market forces at play.

As Bruce (2015) and Toffoletti (2016) have recently argued, current sociological theories and concepts for analyzing media representations have not yet been able to explain the persistent and enduring marginalization of sportswomen (see also Toffoletti, Palmer, & Samie, 2018), and particularly sportswomen who do not conform to the ideal of the 'good white girl' (McDonald, 2002). We argue that the way forward is not to homogenize representations of sportswomen, but to consciously construct discourses in traditional and non-traditional outlets were all women are represented intersectionally; whether that be feminine, butch, athletic, muscular, masculine, or disabled and varied in their range of expressions of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity. To do this, we must start by dismantling hegemonic structures within sport representation and mega-sport event organization as it has been argued that sport operates as a "public and highly visible space in which notions of race, gender, sexuality, ability and class are served up for public consumption" (Cardoso Brown, 2017, p. 479; Ratna, 2018; Toffoletti, Palmer, & Samie, 2018).

Our analysis of media images of "white women smiling" confirm an ongoing insistence on feminine respectability in sport, even when this undermines sportswomen's commitment, passion and drive to succeed. We argue that representations of a broad range of emotions and affect serve to disrupt the constricting norms of feminine respectability. In this way women (and girls) can be supported to break free, or at least agitate against notions of the neoliberal "top girl" (McRobbie, 2007) of sporting success by making visible the diversity of experience in sport.

We also argue for greater representations of sportswomen of color and an acknowledgment that the enduring coupling of whiteness and feminine respectability needs to be broken. The Commonwealth Games is in many ways a celebration of difference and it could be an opportunity to amplify subaltern voices, through dismantling the violence and oppression inherent in its colonial origins (see Cardoso Brown, 2017; Fuller, 2018; Ratna, 2017). However, rather than celebrate difference and subaltern voices, Australian media representations of sportswomen at the Commonwealth Games largely support the notion of the postfeminist global girl as successful, in this way continuing to unquestioningly exhibit whiteness as the norm. In the Commonwealth Games' focus on improving the representation of women, they have failed to take a broader view of who these women are, where they come from, and the struggles and challenges many have faced *because* of their colonial histories.

As our visual analysis of Australian media has shown, women of color and black women's voices have been largely ignored, particularly in the traditional media sampled. The self-described vision of the CGF (2015, p.11) as an organization "uniting the Commonwealth's athletes, citizens and communities through the transformative and connecting power of sport" is yet to come to fruition. Although we embrace the Games' commitment to gender equality (through equal medal opportunities), the continued emphasis on whiteness in sport must be challenged (McDonald, 2005; Fueller, 2018). As Ratna (2017, p.164) notes,

> 'Action' and 'thought' must 'inform one another'. Hence cultural analysis is important to building deeper knowledge about the socio-cultural realities of black women's lives, but this must be done in addition to community engagement, practice and academic interventions which capture the feelings of their (dis)locations of being.

Diverse images of women in their full range of expression – failure, loss, success, celebration, anger – can disrupt notions of respectable femininity, challenging the dominance of whiteness in sport, and taking seriously the efforts of all sportspeople. Yet alone, diverse images in the media are not enough. The role of the CGF also needs to be reflexive of its colonial past, and its desire for a peaceful future. The CGF and host nations should reflect on the violence and suffering caused by colonial expansion under the Commonwealth and consider how *sport* might contribute to healing for harm done and self-determination. Interrogating discourse used is one place to start, in particular the associations with the word 'Commonwealth' and white women smiling.

Notes

1. We collected images from both print and online versions of the *Guardian Australia* as the print version only included five stories on GC2018, with only three images featuring women.

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