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New Sporting Femininities

Embodied Politics in Postfeminist Times

palgrave
macmillan

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ISSN 2522-0330 ISSN 2522-0349 (electronic)
New Femininities in Digital, Physical and Sporting Cultures
ISBN 978-3-319-72480-5 ISBN 978-3-319-72481-2 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72481-2

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018938350

Cover Design: Fatima Jamadar

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer International Publishing AG part of Springer Nature.
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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The Performance of Blackness and Femininity in Postfeminist Times: Visualising Serena Williams Within the Context of Corporate Globalisation

Kristi Tredway

Introduction

Serena Williams has been the most dominant player in the history of women's tennis. Williams played in her first Grand Slam events in 1998. Through 2017, she holds 23 Grand Slam singles titles (seven Australian Open titles, three French Open titles, seven Wimbledon titles and six US Open titles), second in tennis history for most Grand Slam singles titles, amongst both men and women, behind Margaret Court's 24 Grand Slam singles titles. We might never again see a player dominate women's tennis as Williams has.

As the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) rapidly expands across the global marketplace, it is faced with contradictions of the deep-seated racial issues stemming from the origins of tennis and forms of the exotic Other which have heightened value in the global marketplace. Williams performs Blackness like no other person in the history of tennis. Indeed, "unlike Althea Gibson, Zina Garrison, and other African American

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K. Toffoletti et al. (eds.), *New Sporting Femininities*, New Femininities in Digital, Physical and Sporting Cultures, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72481-2_4

female tennis stars whose demeanor and style of play resembled the White women dominating the sport, the Williams sisters basically reject tennis norms" (Collins, 2005, p. 135), particularly the performances closely aligned with White, upper-class femininity. These Black performances by Williams have seemingly been valued for their currency in the global marketplace, so they have at least been tolerated by the WTA, however, on occasion, her performances have been cause for reprimands. Using the concept of "ghettocentrism" (Andrews, Lopes, & Jackson, 2016; Andrews, Mower, & Silk, 2011; Andrews & Silk, 2010), it is the contention here that the WTA tries to both exploit and control Williams' performance of Blackness for gains in the global marketplace. Furthermore, these performances of Blackness are understood as individual preferences and mannerisms within the logic of neoliberalism, rather than the cultural norms of a group of people who, until 1950 with Althea Gibson's entry into the US National Championships (now the US Open), were not even allowed to play top-tier tennis.

This chapter advances analyses of the discourses related to women's sports by thinking about the relationship between performances of Blackness and femininity, and locating these within ongoing postfeminist debates focused on female athleticism. To do this I centralise the embodied performances of Williams within the corporate confines of the WTA. Specifically, two focal points will offer contextual grounding for this analysis: The WTA's "Strong Is Beautiful" advertising campaign, of which Williams participated, and Danish player Caroline Wozniacki's imitation of Williams' body with the use of strategically placed towels.

Contextual Grounding

There have been two prominent issues emerge within women's tennis that can be used to contextually ground this study. The first is the WTA's own "Strong is Beautiful" advertising campaign. The second is the less codified, yet no less significant, moment when Caroline Wozniacki imitated Serena Williams by stuffing a towel into her sports bra and another into the back of her tennis skirt, thus showing exaggeratingly large breasts and buttocks.

The "Strong is Beautiful" advertising campaign for the WTA seems like an ad campaign for a postfeminist movement. The film boasts the top players in the game such as Serena and Venus Williams, Kim Clijsters, Li Na, Petra Kvitova, Caroline Wozniacki, Maria Sharapova, Ana Ivanovic, Sam Stosur, Andrea Petkovic, Victoria Azarenka and others. We know the women as world-class athletes; however, this ad campaign only features tour players in sequins, flowing dresses and other very feminine attire. Furthermore, the campaign focuses primarily on beauty.

In the "Strong is Beautiful" WTA campaign ads, players are wearing anything but athletic wear, nor are they playing tennis. In the images, "the sport's stars are often dressed in frilly (and skimpy) skirts, with full make-up, looking glamorous, and in settings full of provocative imagery" (Fink, 2012, p. 52). Added to the imagery is glitter that explodes off the ball upon impact. Frilly clothes, make-up, glitter—these are the main components of the feminine code. Indeed, Nicole LaVoi claims that, "Yes, these women are beautiful, but we see lots of cleavage and legs, and it's set to music that is reminiscent of soft-core porn" (cited in Adams, 2011).

This projection of femininity is used in a specific way and for a specific reason. As Mary Jo Kane explains, "This approach, or so the argument goes, reassures (especially male) fans, corporate sponsors, and TV audiences that females can engage in highly competitive sports while retaining non-threatening femininity" (Kane, 2011). Janet Fink elaborates by stating that, "This tactic reassures the public that not all female athletes are lesbian, that women can be athletically talented and sexy, and the typical gender order is not threatened by women in sport" (2012, p. 54). Indeed, it is not the sex sells women's sports, but that sex sells sex. Kane states "that what males are interested in consuming is not a women's athletic event but sportswomen's bodies as objects of sexual desire" (Kane, 2011). This projection of (hyper) femininity also operates to keep homophobia at a distance. The idea is that women who are *that* feminine could not possibly be lesbians.

Highlighting how Williams is differently positioned in women's tennis than other players, in December 2012, Caroline Wozniacki imitated Williams during a match which, unlike the previous time she had imitated Williams, garnered widespread media attention. Wozniacki grabbed

some towels and put one inside her sports bra to make her breasts look much larger, and put the other towel into the back of her tennis skirt, making it look as if she had very large buttocks. For those who were not convinced that she was imitating Williams, during the point she played dressed this way, Wozniacki grunted very loudly in the same intonations as Williams. In this postfeminist, colour-blind era, Wozniacki's actions garnered attention. Those rushing to Wozniacki's defence pointed out how it could not have been racially motivated because Wozniacki and Williams are best friends. The WTA pounced on the entertainment value of Wozniacki's actions and spun it into a positive light. Williams had always been visible, yet this spotlighted the ghettocentrism that is pinned upon her. All of this, however, points to the erasure of structural inequality. Wozniacki operated in a postfeminist space of individualism. Her actions were seen as completely located within the interpersonal domain without thought of the structural racism and sexism that exists which renders Black and female bodies as sites for voyeuristic consumption.

When asked about this incident, Williams interestingly brought up a double-standard for men and women in this regard: "I know Caro and I would call her my friend. … I don't think she (meant) anything racist by it" (Sangweni, 2012). Williams went on to say, "[Andy] Roddick and [Novak] Djokovic do it all the time and Caro does (it) and now it's racist??" (Sangweni, 2012). Were Wozniacki's actions more egregious because she is a woman and a competitor to Williams, or are there just fewer restraints on White men? Players imitate other players all the time, however, those imitations are isolated to the form of particular tennis strokes or grunting. The imitation of Williams is different because the focus is on her body. What was apparent is that Wozniacki can operate as a feminist in our postfeminist era while also acting in a racist manner. Again, the focus on Williams' body as the site for imitation conjures up historical notions of the examination of Black bodies within the slave trade. While Wozniacki's White privilege can allow her to appropriate the image of Williams' physicality, Williams' body becomes subdued, less threatening, a site for mockery, while Williams as a person is synthesised down to being only body, and not fully human. This is the problematic undercurrent of Wozniacki's actions.

The Linkage Between Postfeminism and Colour-Blind Racism

There are various interpretations of postfeminism (Genz, 2006; Tasker & Negra, 2007; Negra, 2009; Gill & Scharff, 2011). In this chapter, however, my understanding of postfeminism is that put forth by Angela McRobbie. In her article "Post-feminism and Popular Culture" (2004), McRobbie asserts that, around 1990, feminism transitioned from the very politically charged second-wave feminism to postfeminism. To her, postfeminism is an "active process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 80s come to be undermined" (2004, p. 255). More specifically, what occurs with postfeminism is that feminism is seen as no longer needed, indeed becoming a Gramscian "common sense." However, in the belief that feminism's ideals have already been attained, the politics of feminism becomes lost, starved from lack of attention and nurturing. The WTA's "Strong is Beautiful" ad campaign can be viewed through this lens. It operates as if the gains of the women tennis players who fought so hard for the legitimacy of women's tennis are entrenched, but the consequence of this film is an undermining of the political origin story for women's tennis. Thus, postfeminism is the mechanism by which there is an undoing of the political gains of second-wave feminism.

McRobbie points to two changes that took place in (or around) 1990 that led to postfeminism: (1) a "definitive self-critique in feminist theory" (2004, p. 256) occurred, due to many sound postcolonial and intersectional critiques of feminism that were gaining strength, including the publication of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), and, (2) "popular feminism found expression" (2004, p. 256), especially through magazines. With feminism unravelled and its primary outlet for being a travelling discourse being magazines perused in the check-out line at the grocery store, there is no need to wonder how we arrived into a postfeminist space.

To take a step back in order to explain more fully, in her book, *The Uses of Cultural Studies* (2005), McRobbie illuminates the backstage to Judith Butler's critique of feminism as a "subjectivising discourse" (p. 72) and, thus, in need of reconfiguration:

> As a political movement and, thus, by virtue of being in some sense in pursuit of the possession of representative power, feminism creates its own subjects,…hails them as "women", when, for example, it makes claims on the prevailing political system.…And likewise, when feminism requests of its subjects that they unite in the battle against universal patriarchy, then, argues Butler, this category of universal patriarchy is mobilised as one which can easily transcend cultural differences. (McRobbie, 2005, p. 72).

Thus, feminism created subjects that we called "women" and these subjects laid claims against the State and cultural norms. In doing so, as Butler's argument progresses, feminism created the antithesis to "women," "patriarchy," while also creating a hierarchy of political interventions against this "patriarchy" for feminism to undertake which often placed the concerns of White, heterosexual women at the forefront. Butler, then, in viewing these categories as discursive constructions, argued for a more concrete foundation for feminist politics. Those who only heard Butler's call for the dismantling of feminism, though, did indeed dismantle feminism by disrupting its subjectivising apparatuses. Now, anyone can claim to be a feminist, since it is just a word without a political framework underlying it, yet there is no space and no language in which to critique their claim. This would be postfeminism. Indeed, Butler referred to this as a "juncture of cultural politics, a period that some would call postfeminist" (Butler, 1990, p. 5). What is needed, and McRobbie and Butler would agree, is a critical political force, in that the embedded layers of the structures of power are understood, that is focused on equality for all people. Daunting as this may sound, this is the step we must take to move out of this postfeminist space.

Rosalind Gill offers a concrete foundation for the theoretical underpinnings of postfeminism in her critique of the omission of culture within academic framings of feminism. In discussing feminism through the neoliberal guise of women's personal freedoms, especially concerning clothing, Gill queries "I am interested in why any compelling understanding of the influence of culture is omitted…, and why the 'choices' to be 'respected' are deemed to be arrived at autonomously. I know for myself that many of my choices (particularly those that relate to bodily appearance) are arrived at anything but autonomously" (Gill, 2007, p. 73). She

continues reflecting on her own choices, stating that, "none of this is governed by my unique individual preferences but has everything to do with my daily exposure to a cultural habitat of images that relentlessly shapes my tastes, desires and what I find beautiful" (Gill, 2007, p. 73). Thus, what is perceived by women as a personal choice or preference, is in actuality shaped by all facets of culture. Indeed, "if it were the outcome of girls' individual idiosyncratic preferences, surely there would be greater diversity" (Gill, 2007, p. 73) among the performances that girls and women display. No action and no thought is arrived at without a cultural influence, therefore, truly individual choices made by women cannot exist.

The cultural sensibility that postfeminism has emerged from has also produced colour-blind racism. Both of these sensibilities, postfeminism and colour-blind racism, erase the structures and politics which sustain patriarchy and racism, respectively. Thus, what once was tangible and concrete is now chalked up to interpersonal prejudices that are devoid of structural analysis. The theoretical framework of colour-blind racism is useful in highlighting the differential treatment that Williams receives in professional tennis. Colour-blind racism is pervasive in the US. According to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, rather than the overt racism that can be seen with slavery and Jim Crow laws, "color-blind racism otherizes softly" (2006, p. 3). Bonilla-Silva asserts that "whites freely lash out at minorities ('*They* self-segregate,' '*They* take advantage of the welfare system,' '*They* must feel terrible about affirmative action') and seldom exhibit self-reflexivity; minorities are the problem, whites are not" (2006, p. 66). Indeed, Black people are admonished for reverse-racism whenever they bring up racial inequities, even though, in the US, the legal system and other social structures were created by White people and are maintained by White people, as such, they unfairly advantage White people.

Injustices occur because the sensibilities of postfeminism and colour-blind racism exist in and through four domains of power, as theorised by Patricia Hill Collins: the structural, cultural, disciplinary and interpersonal domains (Collins, 2009, pp. 53–54). The matrix of domination, these four domains of power, shows how "intersecting oppressions are actually organized" (Collins, 2000, p. 18). The structural domain refers to social institutions and explains how they are organised and reproduce

minoritarian subordination over time. As Collins asserts, "one characteristic feature of this domain is its emphasis on large-scale, interlocking social institutions … Because the structural domain is large-scale, system-wide, and has operated over a long period of time via interconnected social institutions, segregation of this magnitude cannot be changed overnight" (2000, p. 277). The disciplinary domain functions, according to Collins, "as a way of ruling that relies on bureaucratic hierarchies and techniques of surveillance" (2000, p. 298). Furthermore, as Collins claims, this "domain manages power relations. It does so not through social policies that are explicitly racist or sexist, but through the ways in which organizations run" (2000, p. 280). The interpersonal domain illuminates how "most individuals have little difficulty identifying their own victimization within some major system of oppression, [however,] they typically fail to see how their thoughts and actions [in everyday interactions] uphold someone else's subordination" (Collins, 2000, p. 287). This interpersonal domain, and the individual nature of sexism and racism (and other discriminations), is what the majority of people believe is the only manifestations of sexism and racism, rather than the more institutionalised forms that these oppressions take. The cultural domain refers to ideology and culture and explains how power is achieved through manipulation. This domain acts as a link between social institutions (the structural domain), their organisational practices (the disciplinary domain) and the level of everyday social interaction (the interpersonal domain).

In regards to sexism and racism, "they are simultaneously structured and resisted *within* each domain as well as *across* all four domains," asserts Collins (2009, p. 54). When we think of a domain of power, we think of the structural domain with its institutional structures and system of law. However, within the confines of today's colour-blind racism, the structural domain is viewed as being completely fair to all people regardless of race, as is the cultural and disciplinary domains. Collins warns us that "it is vitally important to notice that in most people's minds, especially if they believe that a colour-blind society is a reality, the first three domains—the structural, the cultural, and the disciplinary—often disappear. As a result, their understandings of race and racism get collapsed into the interpersonal domain" (2009, p. 54). Thus, racism is seen as

individuals being overtly or covertly prejudiced against people of colour. Colour-blind racism ignores any social or structural biases that exist in our society. Too often, the colour-blind racism that surrounds Williams is wrongly understood as wholly interpersonal, individuals having their personal differences of opinion, which only serves to flatten the understanding we could have if we could include the structural mechanisms of power. For example, Wozniacki can imitate Williams in what seems overtly racist to many people, yet other people see it as one player simply teasing another player, or even justify the actions by saying that Williams has more power than Wozniacki because of her ranking or the many titles she owns. This argument then remains only in the interpersonal domain without any understanding of deeper meanings or other, more systemic, sites of power.

Although cultural studies and media scholars have critically embraced postfeminism to understand various aspects of women's complex subjectivities and ongoing forms of subjugation in contemporary society, most of this literature has focused on the experiences of White girls and women. Few (if any) have considered Black women's experiences in a context of postfeminism. Thus, by exploring Serena Williams within the context of postfeminism and colour-blind racism, this chapter makes an important contribution to this literature.

Ghettocentrism as the Performance of Blackness

Within the field of sociology of sport, ghettocentrism has been a topic that has garnered attention, especially in regards to male sporting celebrity and Blackness (Andrews, 2013; Andrews, Mower, et al., 2011; Andrews, Lopes, et al., 2016; Andrews & Silk, 2010). To expand the discussion of ghettocentrism, this study will draw linkages between ghettocentrism and the performance of Blackness, while also adding the differences that Williams, because she is a woman, brings to the discussion. Thus, an analysis of performativity and feminism will be linked to the discourse of ghettocentrism. First, though, the meaning of the term ghettocentrism needs to be clarified.

Ghettocentrism refers to the phenomenon that occurs in our society where Black athletes are fetishised for their athletic skills while Black people more generally face continual hardships stemming from institutionalised racism. David Andrews, Ronald Mower and Michael Silk (2011) claim that "the logics of ghettocentrism refer to the aesthetic and spatially grounded fetishizing and essentializing of black sporting bodies for their perceived, and indeed conjoined, athletic ability and urban authenticity: they are unproblematically assumed to be the products, and/or progeny, of the mythologized (equally romanticized as demonized) American ghetto" (2010, p. 70). This may seem like an uncomfortable juxtaposition; however, the valourisation of a select few Black athletes is intertwined with the overt subjugation of Black people stemming from the embedded slave narrative that still permeates the US society. Indeed, Collins notes: "Objectifying black bodies enabled slave traders and slave owners to turn black people's bodies into commodities. Slavers assigned monetary value to black people's bodies, and then traded black bodies as commodities on the open market" (Collins, 2006, p. 302). Within this narrative, Black people are essentialised as having bodies built for work (i.e., having value in the marketplace) but lacking minds for complex thinking. There is comfort, then, when a Black athlete shows heightened athletic prowess for those who uncritically accept this narrative. This comfort stems from knowing that the subconsciously understood slave narrative is still intact, and, taken a step further, though never acknowledged publicly, that slavery was justified because Black people, indeed, are physically superior to others. Those not convinced of this telling of the subconsciously held slave narrative need only look at the treatment of those Black athletes who have recently come forward to protest racism, most notably Colin Kaepernick of the National Football League. These athletes are told to focus only on their sport, not politics or social issues. The thinly-veiled racism shows that these athletes are often admired for their athletic prowess and loathed for showing that they have minds of their own, an understanding of social phenomena and agency.

Williams has been racially constructed within women's professional tennis through her clothing, her hair and her mannerisms (Douglas, 2002, 2005, 2012; Schultz, 2005; Spencer, 2001, 2004), essentially through her performance of Blackness; and she has directly experienced

racism within women's professional tennis (Spencer, 2004). Furthermore, penalties have been levied against Williams during matches at Grand Slam events, and likely other events, that have been unjust and paternalistic, such as her fine for her outburst at the 2009 US Open that would be cut in half pending going two years without another outburst, which she accomplished (for a full account, see Tredway, 2016). Thus, at a personal level, Williams performs Blackness, but this is met with overt racist responses from the cultural (with the public), disciplinary (as the fine just described shows) and structural (which is the institutional form of tennis) domains.

Furthermore, within our logic of neoliberalism, activist athletes, who are predominantly Black, are viewed as "choosing" to be disruptive at an individual level. That these athletes could be speaking of broader, more culturally pervasive and systemic, issues is not considered. Ghettocentrism operates through this individual exceptionality in sport and most professional basketball and football teams have their one premier player who is most likely Black. Williams is that player for the WTA. These individual exceptions obscure the structural nature of racism. Jaime Schultz explains:

> The success and visibility of Serena and [her sister] Venus Williams, in tennis and consumer culture, obscures their radicalized exceptionality, extending the myths of color blindness and equal opportunity in US sport and society. Specifically, their accomplishments conceal the social and economic factors that hinder other African Americans' participation in tennis (2005, p. 340).

Similarly, David Leonard asserts that "the simultaneous adoration of Black athletes and entertainers further legitimizes claims of colorblindness" (2004, p. 286). Ghettocentrism, then, is built upon colour-blind racism. Colour-blind racism in sport functions in that "Black athletes not only elucidate the fulfillment of the American Dream but also America's imagined racial progress" (Leonard, 2004, p. 288). For instance, as Kevin Hylton asserts, "the discourse that follows Serena and Venus Williams is one of novelty and awe, but ostensibly a raced, classed and gendered one underpinned by their working-class roots and African American heritage which often trivializes their achievements when they are described as

'natural athletes' and therefore 'physical' rather than 'cerebral' beings" (2009, p. 8). Being White and saying something like, "I'm not racist. I love Serena Williams!" doesn't mean that you are open for understanding the complexities of racism in the USA. It is necessary to know how one is complicit in certain forms of racism and how one has unfair advantages based on race. Williams is BOTH a naturally gifted athlete AND incredibly intelligent at crafting points, besides having worked very hard to hone her skills. These attributes, taken together, have allowed her to become the champion that she is.

At the heart of ghettocentrism is the performance of Blackness coupled with global marketing for corporate gains. As Andrews and Silk (2010) assert in their analysis, the National Basketball Association functions as a "commercially expedient basketball *ghettocentrism*, realized through the strategic promotional mobilization of what are stereotypical signifiers of the urban African American experience and associated aesthetics (including sociospatial location, family history and constitution, and preferences for particular cultural practices, forms of attire, music, hair style, and modes of verbal and nonverbal communication)" (Andrews & Silk, 2010, p. 1627). These signifiers of the urban Black experience, then, and the athletes who embody these signifiers, are commodified for corporate gain. The "associated aesthetics" of ghettocentrism is the juncture where ghettocentrism and the performance of Blackness overlap.

Theories of performance and race, most specifically the performance of Blackness, predominantly rely on three works: José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999), E. Patrick Johnson's *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (2003) and Roderick A. Ferguson's *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (2004). At minimum, "racial performativity informs the process by which we invest bodies with social meaning" (Johnson, 2003, p. 9). Johnson explains further this connection between performance and Blackness when he asserts: "Blackness does not only reside in the theatrical fantasy of the White imaginary that is then projected onto Black bodies, nor is it always consciously acted out; rather, it is also the inexpressible yet undeniable racial experience of Black people—the ways in which the 'living of blackness' becomes a material way of knowing" (Johnson, 2003, p. 8). In expanding on this notion of the performance of

Blackness, Johnson explains that "blackness supersedes or explodes performance in that the modes of representation endemic to performance—the visual and spectacular—are no longer viable registers of racial identification" (Johnson, 2003, p. 8). In other words, there is a tug-of-war or a split consciousness in regards to one's own experiences of being Black and the theatrical expectations that others hold for Black people. This, in many ways, refers back to the treatment of Black athletes mentioned previously. Expressing their experiences of living as a Black person goes against the expected performances of Black people that many White people hold.

Ferguson, in defining queer of colour critique, the merging of performance with the intersection of race and sexuality, asserts that, "queer of color analysis ... interrogates social formations as the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class, with particular interest in how those formations correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices" (Ferguson, 2004, p. 149), thus extending Black feminism (Ferguson, 2004, p. 4). Furthermore, Ferguson adds that, "queer of color analysis disidentifies with historical materialism to *rethink* its categories and how they might conceal the materiality of race, gender, and sexuality. In this instance, to disidentify in no way means to discard" (Ferguson, 2004, p. 5). Thus, the performance of Blackness in this context, then, is the imitation of something believed to be substantive. It's the conjuring of the material, with its historical markers, but which does not exist anymore.

Ferguson alludes to Muñoz in this discussion of disidentifying from particular identity markers. To Muñoz, disidentification resides between identification and counteridentification. As he theorises, "instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this 'working on and against' [disidentification] is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance" (Muñoz, 1999, pp. 11–12). For the Black athlete, then, who wants to maximise her benefit from corporate structures, must use a process of disidentification. At the same time the professional Black athlete is a multi-millionaire, she is also maintaining enough "working on and

against" the corporate system and society at large to maintain her authentic urban Blackness. To identify would be to not be seen as "Black enough." To counter-identify would be being removed from the arena altogether, not playing the game when you see disparity being levied from the top. Disidentifying allows for the playing of the game while still being cognizant of the power structures at play and how one is a player in that system, and developing strategies for being true to oneself while also being a participant in the system.

Williams operates as a disidentified figure in professional tennis. She is a powerful Black woman, coded through ghettocentrism with the continual reference to her childhood spent in Compton, California, an epicentre for racial angst in the US, while playing a sport that is imbued with the White, upper-class mores from which it was formed. The presence and dominance of Williams forces the tennis world to do the uncomfortable work of critically reflecting on its history and its embedded cultural forms. At the same time Williams pushes against the Whiteness of tennis, tennis is using the logic of ghettocentrism to sell Williams for particular corporate gains. Williams performs Blackness in ways that are recast away from cultural identity to personal choices or preferences. From a postfeminist standpoint, rather than a process of complex negotiation that Williams must navigate, she is required to personally manage or navigate the institutional expectations that frame Black women's bodies as "excessive," "non-normative" and outside the bounds of the White, upper-class milieu of women's tennis. Indeed, as McRobbie points out, "choice is surely, within lifestyle culture, a modality of constraint. The individual is compelled to be the kind of subject who can make the right choices. By these means new lines and demarcations are drawn between those subjects who are judged responsive to the regime of personal responsibility, and those who fail miserably" (McRobbie, 2004, p. 261). The WTA could deflect the call for self-reflection away by making claims that Williams made the wrong choices within the structure of professional tennis.

Serena Williams and the Performance of Blackness Within the Corporate Structures of the Women's Tennis Association

Corporatisation and globalisation go hand in hand. The impetus to establish a corporation is to make gains in the marketplace and, once a marketplace is saturated, new marketplaces need to be created and cultivated in order to ensure the economic viability of the corporation. The WTA is not immune to this. The WTA was formed within the social auspices of liberal feminism in 1973 with a primary focus on pay equity with men. The WTA's subsequent move towards corporatisation in the early- to mid-1990s had four prongs. First, through internal restructuring, the WTA moved from being a players' association, with power distributed across a wide selection of players of various rankings, to a corporate model of a few chosen marquee players holding power. Then, because the markets in the USA and Europe had been saturated, the WTA expanded into the Middle East and China. Third, with the additional tournaments, the WTA shifted from a model of free-choice for players, where players could play whichever tournaments they wanted, to a system of mandatory tournaments, with limited choice beyond those. This has proven to be a means for the WTA to constrain and control its players. Not only was the focus on expanding markets, but also on policing the "ideal" of womanhood from within tennis through anti-grunting policies and, as has been discussed, their "Strong is Beautiful" advertising campaigns, which was the fourth prong.

The restructuring of the WTA was unfortunate. David Harvey asserts that, "the main substantive achievement of neoliberalization…has been to redistribute, rather than to generate, wealth and income" (2005, p. 159). Indeed, the redistribution was upwards, taken from the mid-level players and given to the top-ranked players. The previously player-centred WTA was fashioned into a corporate entity with top commodities, the top-ranked players, marketed at the expense of mid-level players. Of course, now, the focus is on the stars of the game, without much concern for all of the players regardless of ranking or social status.

The depoliticisation of women's tennis and players has been distinct since around 2010. Politicisation detracts from the commodity value of professional athletes. Thus, the WTA, as a corporation, is invested in the market values of its commodities and is hoping for a strong return on that investment. What is important to remember though is that these commodities are actual women. In some ways, Williams has pushed against the homogenisation of players in the media and advertising; however, she, too, has played roles in various WTA marketing schemes, including the "Strong is Beautiful" ad campaign, that seems to display the power women can achieve but only through a literal veil of femininity. In these advertisements, professional tennis players, one at a time, wear flowing clothing while hitting a tennis ball that, then, explodes into sparkles or variously coloured chalk. From the angle of postfeminism, of course these players have the freedom to display themselves in this way, and it was probably even fun. Who doesn't want to hit a tennis ball that will explode into sparkles on impact? However, the focus on the bodies of these players as they are adorned in flowing silk with their skin oiled, gives insight into the WTA's move towards unravelling the feminist gains made and crafting commodities to be sold around the globe.

As previously described, ghettocentrism is the performance of Blackness coupled with commodification in the global marketplace; however, the global marketplace is primarily controlled by White, middle-class consumers who want to purchase (the symbols of) the exotic Other. Stuart Hall explains, "certain forms of modern advertising are still grounded on the exclusive, powerful, dominant, highly masculinist, old Fordist imagery, of a very exclusive set of identities. But side by side with them are the new exotics, and the most sophisticated thing is to be in the new exotica" (Hall, 1991, p. 31). Or, as Ben Carrington identifies, "The forms of commodity racism that once marked the period of European Imperialism… have now been replaced by the commodification of blackness itself" (Carrington, 2001, pp. 108–109).

This commodification of the exotic Other, in this case Black athletes, was described by Frantz Fanon in 1952, when he wrote that "there is one expression that with time has become particularly eroticized: the black athlete" (1952/2008, p. 136). Fanon was writing about the Black male athlete; however, the same holds true for Black female athletes, possibly

to an even greater extent. Ben Carrington explains the Black athlete as the exotic Other further:

> The black athlete is ... positioned as a site for voyeuristic admiration—the black athlete is idolized for its sheer super-human physicality—but also controlled by a complex process of objectification and sexualization that once again renders the threat of negritude controllable to white patriarchy ... The fear of the black athlete as a commodity-sign is thus appropriated, its political symbolic potential neutered, and finally "domesticated" by its exploitation within contemporary consumer society and its attendant media culture (2010, p. 88).

Fanon did not identify the sex of the "black athlete" of which he wrote; however, it is safe to assume that he was referring to the objectification and sexualisation of the Black male body. For Black women, though, this objectification and sexualisation is far greater because the Black female body is objectified and sexualised both for being female and for being Black. Furthermore, in the heteropatriarchy of the corporate marketplace, men have always held more value than women, and (Black) men have been valourised for their physical dominance in sport, whereas "the stereotype of women athletes as 'manly' and as being lesbians and for Black women as being more 'masculine' than White women converge to provide a very different interpretive context for Black female athletes" (Collins, 2005, p. 135), adding another layer of politics in which Black women must navigate.

Collins goes a step further in speaking of the Black male athlete and the Black male criminal as similarly situated within this global marketplace:

> In the context of a powerful global mass media, black men's bodies are increasingly objectified within popular culture in ways that resemble the treatment of all women. ...Yet the real struggle is less about the content of black male and black female images and more about the treatment of black people's bodies as valuable commodities within advertising and entertainment. Because this new constellation of images participates in commodified global capitalism, in all cases, representations of black people's bodies are tied to structures of profitability (Collins, 2006, p. 311).

Indeed, this objectification and commodification disembodies racism from Black bodies, removing the possibility of those Black bodies belonging to spaces of resistance. These Black bodies are rendered safe even though they hold within them all of the signifiers of urban Blackness. Indeed, Wozniacki's imitation of Williams operated in two ways: It was "safe" for Wozniacki to imitate Williams because it is clear that she viewed Williams as separate from racism; however, Wozniacki's seemingly unraced imitation highlighted a dominant feature of racism, the appropriation and mocking of a person belonging to a race different than one's own and whose race is summarily ignored, controlled or reimagined into less frightening forms.

Williams operates within the confines of the corporate structure of the WTA while being the WTA's most high-profile player. Just when the WTA realised that it was saturated with players who looked and played alike—White players who all played from the baseline—numbing tennis fans with boredom, Williams, who joined the professional tennis circuit a year after her sister, Venus, emerged like a breath of fresh air. There had been Black players before, but none elicited the fear and excitement of the particular performance of Blackness that she offered. The fetishisation of her otherness, her race, her ties to Compton, California, the epicentre in the 1990s of urban Blackness, offered a ticket for the WTA to broaden its global appeal.

Williams is positioned within tennis differently than Black tennis players in the past. In writing about the Williams sisters, and their positioning within the historically White, upper-class milieu of women's tennis, Collins asserts:

> Unlike Althea Gibson, Zina Garrison, and other African American female tennis stars whose demeanor and style of play resembled the White women dominating the sport, the Williams sisters basically reject tennis norms. They are exceptionally strong and play power games like men. They rebuff tennis "whites" in favour of form-fitting, flashy outfits in all sorts of colours. They play with their hair fixed in beaded, African-influenced cornrows that are occasionally dyed blonde. The tennis world cannot remove them because the Williams sisters win. Their working-class origins mean that they don't fit into the traditional tennis world and they express little desire

> to mimic their White counterparts. Yet their achievements force issues of excellence and diversity to the forefront of American politics. (2005, p. 135)

Collins is the first to claim that Williams not only operates differently than her White counterparts in women's tennis, she operates differently than her Black predecessors. Gibson and Garrison attempted "to mimic their White counterparts" in order to find success in tennis and to ensure that their environments were a less hostile. What makes the tennis world uneasy about Williams is that she wins and does so while she "reject[s] tennis norms," as Collins (2005) asserts. Her disidentification within women's tennis causes unease among the predominantly White consumers of professional tennis. While Williams is exotic within tennis, conjuring up our imaginings of the dangers and excitement of urban Blackness, those very same imaginings frightens people. For many White, middle- and upper-class people, the imagined theatre of urban Blackness is always fraught with danger and excitement, mesmerising at the same time it can repel with fear. It is at this juncture that commodified Blackness holds its highest value in the global marketplace.

Conclusion

The individualism afforded through neoliberalism offers Williams space for the performance of her own style of Blackness and, as the exotic Other of professional tennis and through the mechanism of ghettocentrism, the WTA found that she is a lucrative commodity in the global marketplace. However, individualism within the logic of neoliberalism has constraints. Those constraints have been blatantly foisted upon and through Williams at the nexus of postfeminism and colour-blind racism. This chapter has argued that postfeminism and colour-blind racism work relationally within a US cultural sensibility to problematically produce Williams as "post race" and "freely choosing" in her expressions and embodiments of Black femininity. Through the focus on Williams as an individual apart from our cultural realm, an impossibility for anyone, the social structures and politics that sustain patriarchy and racism are erased. Direct acts of

sexism and racism, that were once tangible and concrete, are deemed to be simple manifestations of interpersonal prejudices devoid of any structural analysis.

Williams has found a path through this postfeminist epoch, with its anti-feminist and anti-activist bend, even while performing Blackness and maintaining her status as a lucrative commodity in the global marketplace for the WTA. Whereas athletes in other sports, namely basketball and football, have been chastised for the political actions that they have chosen to take part in, Williams has struck a balance where she is given some freedom from the WTA to be an activist, primarily through social media outlets. Granted, she never speaks of activism during tournaments, when she is working. This could be due to the different social milieu in which tennis operates versus basketball and football, or it could be due to her restraint in speaking outside of tennis venues. Tennis is known as a sport that is physically demanding, but it is equally or more mentally challenging. This feature might leave a space for activism within tennis and a space where a Black woman can display her understanding and experiences of the world around her.

Even though the WTA had crafted itself into a global corporation, it had to reconfigure itself in regards to the performance of Blackness because, as Collins says, "the tennis world cannot remove them because the Williams sisters win" (Collins, 2005, p. 135). The WTA could not have easily removed Williams or banned her from tournaments, and Williams was unwilling to identify, to use Muñoz's term, with the establishment. Instead, they seem to have crafted a partnership in which Williams is allowed certain freedoms—for example, refusing to play the Indian Wells tournament, which is a mandatory event, for 14 years due to the racist incidences that occurred in 2001 (for an extended discussion of the Indian Wells incident, see Spencer, 2004)—in exchange for not speaking out against the WTA. This lucrative partnership has financially benefitted both sides involved.

The "Strong is Beautiful" advertising campaign shows that powerful women, including Williams, can choose as individuals to present themselves in ways that ultimately harm women and the power that women's tennis has. This postfeminist unravelling of the gains made by the women who fought so hard for women's professional tennis when it was in its

infancy is problematic. Wozniacki's actions show the extent to which colour-blind racism has permeated the WTA. The "Strong is Beautiful" film highlights the conflicts within postfeminism and begs the question of where one's individualism ends and where one's responsibility to an affiliated group begins, especially when the group is underpinned by feminism. Williams' own actions outside of women's tennis show her commitment to ending racism and sexism in society—refusing to play the Charleston, South Carolina, tournament until the Confederate flag was removed from the capitol grounds, teaming up with the Equal Justice Initiative, which works towards ending racial injustices within the arena of prison sentencing, during her comeback to Indian Wells. These multiple responses by Williams show the complexity of the performance of Blackness and femininity within our current postfeminist times.

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