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## Reading Ronaldo: Contingent Whiteness in the Football Media

Kevin Hylton and Stefan Lawrence

### Abstract

Ever since his introduction to the first-team at Manchester United FC, Cristiano Ronaldo Dos Santos Aveiro has been recognised as one of the footballing world's most stand-out football players. In turn, Ronaldo has drawn the attention of scholars working across a number of disciplines. While sports economists and sociologists of sport, amongst others, have contributed to a growing literature about Ronaldo and the social implications of his on and off-field behaviour, few critical analyses have considered the racialised aspects of Ronaldo's representations, or how audiences make sense of his racialised or ethnic identity. Using images of Ronaldo, which we presented to and discussed with self-identified physically active white British men, we explore what it is representations and audience interpretations of Ronaldo reveal about the complexities of white male identity formation. We do this to understand better how white male identities can be read and interpreted through and in the context of football. Facilitated by our conception of *contingent whiteness*, we argue that white British men's interpretations of Ronaldo's whiteness are inextricably linked to discourses of 'race', masculinities and football.

### Introduction

Cristiano Ronaldo Dos Santos Aveiro is a Portuguese professional footballer, better known simply as Cristiano Ronaldo, Ronaldo, and sometimes just by his initials and shirt number *CR7*. Ronaldo currently plays for Real Madrid C. F. in Spain's Primera División and became the most expensive footballer in the sport's history after leaving Manchester United FC to join the Spanish club in a deal reported to be worth circa £80 million. Widely touted as the world's best player, Ronaldo, who is equally well-known for his conduct off-field, is a man who has drawn the attention of the media as well as scholars: from those researching in the field of sports economics, who have considered amongst other things the development of 'CR7' or 'Brand Ronaldo'<sup>1</sup>, to others working in the sociology of sport, in particular sport, gender and masculinity studies<sup>2</sup>.

While literature in these areas continues to grow, it is especially noticeable that few critical analyses have considered the racialised aspects of Ronaldo's representations or how audiences make sense of his racialised or ethnic identity. And so in sport, where sociological and political commentaries on the racialised significance of prominent Black athletes have become more regular, if not central<sup>3</sup>, the paucity of literature critically examining the racialised aspects of white male athletic bodies is significant. Carrington<sup>4</sup> has suggested that white athletic bodies are rarely thought of as 'raced' bodies by sociologists of sport and as such "'whiteness" has, regrettably, become the default, unmarked, normative position through which much work in the area is produced". The dangers associated with ignoring media representations and audience interpretations of Ronaldo's identity are that the white athletic body continues to be perceived as aracial and the experiences of white men are not named and therefore rendered unremarkable.

Throughout this paper we explore what it is representations and audience interpretations of Ronaldo reveal about the complexities of white male identity formation so as to understand better how white male identities are continually (re)constructed, consolidated and contested through and in the context of football, and beyond. First, we outline the theoretical framework employed during this research which, in so doing, establishes the epistemological context of the paper. Second, a brief discussion of the methods is included; complimented by a critical reading of Ronaldo's representation in *Sport* magazine. Finally, we consider the responses of our participants to the images of Ronaldo and how it is these readings help to make visible under-researched white masculinities and their related privileges, assumptions and predilections. Through an exploration of *contingent whiteness*, this process contributes to the distortion of white male supremacy, and illuminates the racialised aspects of the white male athletic body.

### **Theoretical Frame**

A recognition of white people as a social category and whiteness as a racialised process forces us to ask the question that if whiteness and white people are merely illusory, recursive constructs, then how is whiteness performed? How do our bodies 'do' 'race' through the modalities of other social identities? What are the markers, signs and

symbols, other than modernist categories such as skin colour and hair texture, through which whiteness is elucidated? And what are the implications of this? These are a number of issues we explore in the paper.

Whiteness is directly linked to a societal position of power that affords those perceived as white with invisible privileges unavailable to Othered bodies<sup>5</sup>. In this sense, whiteness can be thought of as a form of property or resource<sup>6</sup>. A particularly useful analogy of white privilege is provided by Scheurich<sup>7</sup> who likens it to walking down the street while money is put in white people's pockets without them ever knowing. Thus, for Hartigan<sup>8</sup> one of the main achievements of whiteness studies is that it has demonstrated how white people are beneficiaries of a host of seemingly neutral social arrangements and institutional operations, all of which seem to them at least to have no racial basis. To be white then is a privilege many white people cannot 'see', resulting in their power to influence others in myriad settings, afforded by whiteness, to be unacknowledged<sup>9</sup>.

We explore how the privileges of whiteness can emerge in how individuals and groups are depicted in the media and how various signifiers of identities are therefore received. A key process used in the sending and receiving of messages in the media is the process of racialisation. Miles and Brown<sup>10</sup> use the term to:

... refer to those instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities. The concept therefore refers to a process of categorisation, a representational process of defining an Other (usually, but not exclusively) somatically.

For example, through racialisation, white athletic bodies are more frequently described as hardworking and intelligent than their Black counterparts<sup>11</sup>, inferring that their athletic achievements are somehow more remarkable, more human, more esteemed. To this end, white athletes are privileged to exist as unique athletic bodies, propelled to athletic stardom by exceptional circumstances, distinctive physiological characteristics and/or particularised intellectual/emotional temperament<sup>12</sup>. Given that white

privilege, in the context of football, and sport and leisure more broadly, is relatively under-researched, making a study of this nature increasingly apposite, we explore some of the ways in which privilege is manifest and contested through media representations and how audiences interpret media imagery.

While it is absolutely important to understand white privilege, and how it operates in sporting contexts, any consideration of white privilege must also consider the notion of white supremacy<sup>13</sup>. This is a necessary departure because, although the two processes are related, the conditions of white supremacy, not only convenience white people but, more importantly, make white privilege possible<sup>14</sup>. Importantly, white supremacy should not be understood in narrow terms as a feature of contemporary neo-Nazi politics<sup>15</sup>; rather it is suggested that the concept be theorised as “a political, economic, and cultural system in which white people overwhelmingly inhabit networks of power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement”<sup>16</sup>.

In many respects, white supremacy has very little to do, if anything, with a hatred of Black people but more a hegemonic defence of (racialised) status and power. We point to the dismissal of comments made by ex-Arsenal and England footballer, Sol Campbell, as a pertinent example of white supremacist systems in operation in football, who suggested that had he been white he would have been England captain “for a decade or more”<sup>17</sup>. That is, as opposed to viewing Campbell’s claim as a worthy or serious complaint, the response of senior Football Association (FA) officials, and their counterparts in mainstream football media, was to elevate their own position and deny that racism or their recruitment and progression processes could have been a factor. Former FA chief executive, Mark Palios<sup>18</sup>, rather illogically, went as far as to suggest Campbell’s attempt to raise the issue “does the case of fighting against racism no favours”. The failure of English football’s elite to investigate these claims therefore, not only denies and invalidates Campbell’s racialised experience of football, but also highlights how people, systems, policies or cultures can subjugate racialised individuals. hooks<sup>19</sup> offers a further sobering suggestion that white supremacist systems are made possible predominantly by liberal white people who “affirm the very structure of racist domination and oppression that they profess to wish to see eradicated”.

This observation of white supremacy in football invites critique of the idealism of colour-blindness that ignores racialised processes, differences and inequalities because of their tendency to support unwittingly (or otherwise) the status quo; or indeed to be overly idealistic<sup>20</sup>. To further demonstrate this in the context of football, many people, such as influential players, coaches, administrators, managers and owners, often perceive of themselves in this seemingly 'race' neutral manner<sup>21</sup>. However, King<sup>22</sup> argues that because "the individuals who occupy ... dominate ... positions cannot see themselves as racial beings, taking advantage of the privileges of whiteness", white supremacist systems in football are allowed to persist, as influential individuals flatly deny that their actions and decisions are influenced by an often unconscious desire to preserve a racialised order. This denial of ignorance toward racialised processes, is an extremely important feature of white supremacy in that it allows 'traditional' customs and practices (for example recruiting and scouting in some but not all communities) and ethnocentric cultural and social norms (for example social events surrounding football) to present themselves as (seemingly) 'race' neutral or, more worryingly, as 'normal', 'natural', 'right' or 'truthful'<sup>23</sup>.

### **Whiteness as contingent**

Some who theorise whiteness have at times treated "race and racism discourse as white domination of, and white discrimination against, non-whites, and especially blacks"<sup>24</sup>. However, while this is not to deny that white people benefit from innumerable societal privileges not afforded to Black people<sup>25</sup>, or that white supremacy is often the process through which society regularly conducts 'business', to treat the white (male) body as an absolute marker of unbridled social power, is to overlook the heterogeneity of white masculinities and the contingent, marginalised/alternative nature of whiteness<sup>26</sup>. In other words, the perpetual struggles between differing groups of white men, all of whom attempt to impose their own version of whiteness and masculinity, should invite a more nuanced and intricate reading of white male supremacy.

We therefore contend that whiteness or white people cannot be viewed as anything other than contingent. Neither do we presume that white supremacy is maintained only by white people, since this would be to offer essentialist ideas that undermine the

complexity of whiteness as hegemonic, peripheral and contingent. Similarly, the complexity of identities of those identified and identifying as white require the exercise of a sociological imagination and critical gaze<sup>27</sup>. Nayak<sup>28</sup>, for example, points out that,

[w]hiteness is not homogenous but fractured by the myriad ethnic practices of Russian Jews, Poles, Italians or Irish people (to say nothing of the individual ways they may 'live' ethnicity).

Satzewich<sup>29</sup>, too, agrees and notes "[w]hiteness is ... historically, geographically, and socially contingent". Understanding how whiteness is conditional emphasises the need for a more critical exploration of sporting and media practices, representations, and policies which fail to adequately recognise racisms simply because the recipients are deemed to be white<sup>30</sup>.

As well as differences existing between diverse white ethnic groups, whiteness has been shown to be divided by other social factors such as class<sup>31</sup>, sexuality<sup>32</sup> and gender<sup>33</sup>. Therefore, the notion "'whiteness' speaks power and 'blackness' speaks powerlessness" is an altogether overly simplistic assertion<sup>34</sup>. That is, whiteness should be thought of as a process that is inflected differently by its intersections with numerous and competing social, ethnic, political, cultural and racialised discourses. We embrace the notion of contingent whiteness for its deconstructive potential and thus seek to highlight the socially constructed nature of racial categories and the porous and shifting propensities of racialised processes.

### **Whiteness as performance**

The discursive and embodied signification of race is forever incoherent and can only approximate "... identity through socially recognizable signs, symbols and motifs. In this reading race is something that we 'do' rather than who we are, it is a performance that can only ever give illusion to the reality it purports."<sup>35</sup>

Inherent to Nayak's understanding of 'race', racial identity and racialised processes is the notion of performativity<sup>36</sup>. In simple terms, performativity is the perpetual repetition, reproduction and re-enactment of dominant discourses that serve to conceal

the fictiveness of social identities. Nayak's<sup>37</sup> usage of the term is then intended to demonstrate that whiteness is a performance, a racial discourse and a process of (dis)embodiment in the sense that 'doing' whiteness "involves an intrinsically different body schema", often with differing levels of rewards, than those wishing to perform blackness, for example. This is not a simple allusion to skin colour; rather, it is a reference to a way of conducting, acting, dressing, speaking, being and living with and through a racialised body. In this way, understanding whiteness as performatively constituted points to the possibility that any body can 'do', or indeed fail to 'do', whiteness (or blackness or Asianness, for that matter). In turn, this conceptualisation rejects "the simplistic assumption that 'whiteness' and 'white people' are one and the same thing"<sup>38</sup>. Indeed, whiteness is slippery and continually shifting precisely because it is interpreted differently by a multitude of different people.

The assertion that whiteness is not linked fixedly to phenotype<sup>39</sup> enables us to understand how racialised performances are particularly important features of white supremacy. That is, because whiteness can be 'done' by any body, if it is performed convincingly, certain 'deserving' 'non-white' bodies can also 'cash in' on white privilege, which further supports the notion of a just and colour-blind society, enabling whiteness as discourse to remain illusive, invisible. For example, King<sup>40</sup> and Burdsey<sup>41</sup> have argued that black and Asian professional male footballers, respectively, have to imitate white working-class player behaviours in order to negotiate belonging: those who assimilate into white (Anglo) cultural settings and traditions, manifested in English football, find progression more regularly than those who do not. In turn, this allows a recognition that racialised performativity acts as a measure of "who is worthy of inclusion in the circle of whiteness"<sup>42</sup>. White privilege, to this end, is not only signified by the body but what it does and how it does it. Some of this unpredictability, alternative or 'contingent whiteness' in this case emerges as we not only explore how the whiteness of Cristiano Ronaldo is perceived by self-identified white men in England but also how whiteness in football is inextricably linked to discourses of masculinity.

## **Methods**

This paper emerged from a larger study exploring the racialised aspects of media representations of athletic bodies from three British men's magazines (*Men's Health*,



*Sport*, and *Jump*). The magazines were selected to interrogate how their representations were interpreted by white men<sup>43</sup>. Following Frankenberg<sup>44</sup>, in light of the observations made previously regarding the tendency for researchers to overlook the racial and gendered identities of white men, this study identified and interviewed twenty two white British men - between the ages of eighteen and forty-five - of differing political leanings, class backgrounds, education, region of origin, economic background and marital status. A substantive aspect of the larger study considered how media images of athletic bodies influenced physically active, self-identified white British men's perceptions of their own racialised and gendered identities and those of Others. Interviews lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours.

Using a triptic of images from the original study (see Figure 1) of Cristiano Ronaldo selected from *Sport* magazine, presented for discussion with the sample, we explore an aspect of the study that considered how whiteness was attributed and denied as it intersected with masculinities and Othered identities. In this sense, the discussion that follows is concerned with *audience interpretations* of media images, which is a surprisingly under-researched area of critical 'race', gender and media studies<sup>45</sup>. In order to interpret responses and interpretations we employ a blended "interpretive" and "reflexive" approach to interview analysis<sup>46</sup>, within a critical race theory framework<sup>47</sup>. To reinforce this issue, we also make reference to responses to a Dolce and Gabbana advertisement, featuring a number of prominent Italian professional male footballers in nothing but underwear emblazoned with the word "CALCIO" (see Figure 2), to further support our analysis. These images were purposively selected<sup>48</sup>. The work of Hall<sup>49</sup>, Carrington<sup>50</sup> and Hylton<sup>51</sup> also draw upon this sampling method and have thus shown its utility in identifying and exploring the politics of racialised representations.

### **Playing with Ronaldo: Contextualising the images**

According to *Sport* magazine<sup>52</sup>, Ronaldo should be recognised as "the world's finest footballer" and they also honour him in their annual awards with "BEST ENTERTAINER"<sup>53</sup>. As a result, *Sport* offers a short interview with him which is complemented by three different but common images in the UK of Ronaldo (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Cristiano Ronaldo (from Sport, 18th December 2009: 36).**

The first and largest image of Ronaldo is one in which he is pictured jumping into the air, with one arm aloft, sideways on to the camera, celebrating a goal. This act inevitably takes place in the middle of a game and it is Ronaldo's body, its abilities and signature playing style, that is the focal point. This image allows for a comprehensive examination of both the brand and equipment associated with the young Portuguese' multimillion-pound assets.

The second image shows Ronaldo exposing a naked, tensed, muscular upper-body. This pose allows *Sport's* predominately male audience to gaze uninterrupted at his muscular torso. Ronaldo's head this time is also clearly visible and is allowed to extend beyond the rest of the picture, a freedom symbolic of an inability to contain him. Finally, the third image is one of a more restrained Ronaldo, in a sports car, complete with sunglasses. These images invite a reading of Ronaldo as more than a footballing body. He is a pictogram of glamour, celebrity, class, arrogance and pretentiousness. While many covet his success they are also alienated by their knowledge of the slim chance of emulating it.

Extending these themes, below the three images, *Sport's* accompanying article begins by outlining how Ronaldo crashed "his new Ferrari [into] ... a tunnel wall in a mysterious single-car pile up, possibly caused by him admiring his rear-view reflection for a tad too long"<sup>54</sup>. The mockery of Ronaldo's lifestyle and objectification of his body, the angle the journalist has clearly adopted for the piece, continues further: this time it is his decision to act as "the face and gonads of Emporio Armani underpants"<sup>55</sup> that draws ridicule. In sum, whether the article is perceived as, at best, mischievous or 'laddish' or, at worst, malicious, its sardonic tone is commonly associated with Ronaldo and inspired nonetheless by Ronaldo's performance of white heteromascularity.

Ronaldo's perceived willingness to perform heteromascularity in such a manner is unbecoming of dominant imaginings of normative, heterosexual (white) British masculinities<sup>56</sup>, which tend to be represented as committed, heroic and courageous during sporting competition. In this sense, the article positions Ronaldo's sporting

masculinity as culturally distinct from white, British and other central and northern European men<sup>57</sup>. Once again, it is not our intent to cast a moral judgement on Ronaldo or his off-field behaviour but it is to comment on the disparities that exist between different representations of male athletic bodies and how whitenesses are read contingently.

Ronaldo's performance of his white, male, heterosexual body problematises and counterposes the supposed ascendancy of more traditional British imaginations and performances of football masculinities as stoic, disembodied and macho<sup>58</sup>. After all, from a British context, Ronaldo is a man who dares to be decorated with multiple honours in his profession (by employing an 'entertaining' playing style (as opposed to a more industrious British approach); who has amassed considerable wealth persisting with this tactic; is admired by a significant number of women and men; takes particular care of his appearance; and all this despite acting in a way that traditional and dominant forms of white (Anglo) masculinity understand as 'feminine', 'gay' or the slightly less pejorative 'metrosexual'. To this end, *Sport's* mockery of Ronaldo, which (re)establishes and preserves imagined ethnic stereotypes of Southern European football masculinities, serves to locate him as an individual, who may be a fine athlete but, whose lifestyle and reiterative behaviours require regulation and critical commentary, which *Sport* duly provides.

### **Results and Discussion: White Men Talk Whiteness**

As already noted, 'white people' do not exist as a neat, stable cohort whom exercise power uniformly. Indeed there are power struggles between differing whiteness discourses over who and/ or what can be perceived as white, 'inside', 'powerful', 'us'. So as to provide further empirical support for some of the claims made above, it was imperative that other media consumers' perspectives on images of Ronaldo were gathered. The participants' readings of Ronaldo, it will be argued, are able to elucidate, some of the themes discussed in the previous section yet further, while also highlighting an implicit racialised politics that illustrates the contingent nature of whiteness, which goes beyond football.

Having been presented with the images of Ronaldo (see Figure 1) participants were asked to comment on how they perceived his ethnicity:

**Bradley:** *I would look at him as a white man ... Yes, I would picture him as a white male to be honest. I don't know why just because he doesn't look a black orientation [sic].*

**Scott:** *I guess I'd put Ronaldo, although he's Mediterranean, so he's got that darker skin tone but, I'd still class him as Caucasian [sic]. I think?*

**Damian:** *Well if you sat me down ... and you said "Right, pile of white people, pile of black people" there would be ... Ronaldo [and] Dolce & Gabbana [advertisement featuring Italian football players] ..., that I'd have to put in an 'other' pile.*

There are three points emergent from a reading of these comments that are supported by interviews more broadly. Firstly, these particular responses demonstrate the salience of 'race' in the everyday, how 'race' is constructed and perpetuated without anxiety, and the instrumentality of a black-white dualism. The participants often engaged in this process so as to articulate a racialised politics of belonging. Bradley's reading of Ronaldo, above, demonstrates this most effectively as his understanding of the player's ethnicity is inherently linked to, and reliant on, his own imaginary conception of those being of a "black orientation". Damian, too, although he does begin to acknowledge the failings of a simple black-white dichotomy, nonetheless begins his reading of Ronaldo from a very similar viewpoint as Bradley. Hence, working within this narrow conceptual framework, the white men who were interviewed could not easily agree upon the nature of Ronaldo's ethnic identity/whiteness/ Otherness, in part because they interpreted a question about ethnicity to be a question about what Du Bois<sup>59</sup> described as 'colour, hair and bone'.

Secondly, the responses of participants also imply, to greater or lesser degrees, that Ronaldo should either be placed in an 'other' category or be classified as white, but only begrudgingly. Scott, for instance, expresses uncertainty about Ronaldo's suitability to

whiteness *because* of his “Mediterranean” heritage (although he was born and raised in Madeira, an island in the Atlantic Ocean). Others too were keen to point out that Ronaldo was “Portuguese” (Adam), from the “Eurozone” (Jake) or “kind of Hispanic” (Damian). To further demonstrate this confusion, Damian’s deliberations over Ronaldo’s racial and ethnic identity are especially interesting. That is, while he indeed falls short of specifying whether the ‘other’ category he believes to be useful should be called “*Hispanic*” - a racialised group emergent only recently and popularised largely by American discourses on immigration from Central and Latin America - unlike Bradley, he explicitly does not recognise Ronaldo as a “white person”. Thus, for Damian, there is something not quite ‘white’ about Ronaldo, suggesting that whiteness has a cultural cost to it. While it is certainly worth mentioning the pervasiveness of American popular culture in informing British racialised discourses, these testimonies illustrate the conflation of race and ethnicity, the arbitrary nature of processes of racialisation and how it is whiteness is indeed contingent.

Thirdly, and of particular importance, is the way in which the body is identified as a central signifier of ‘race’. That is, while Bradley states Ronaldo “doesn’t *look* ... black” Scott unequivocally makes reference to Ronaldo’s “darker skin tone” as a marker of a racialised embodied Otherness. While the former refers to Ronaldo’s physical characteristics, the latter statement is particularly telling given that the use of the word “darker” implies Ronaldo’s skin tone lies away from Scott’s exemplar of ‘properly’ white bodies. Thus, despite post-race theorists rightly demonstrating the limits of understanding phenotypical difference as a marker of racial difference<sup>60</sup>, this discussion demonstrates that future research would be equally advised not to dismiss the notion that ‘race’ continues to be read onto and inscribed into skin colour. The testimonies gathered during this research highlight the difficulties white men have in escaping speaking of culture and ethnicity in racial terms. This not only illustrates the willingness of some to imbue the body with racialised meaning, highlighting the significant position the body occupies in the politics of ‘race’, but also demonstrates that the imaginary boundaries between *dominant and contingent whiteness(es)* are being perpetually contested.

Performances of racialised identities are inflected differently by differing ethnic, national, class and gendered identities. In this sense it would be erroneous and restrictive to our understanding of sport and leisure, as spaces in which identities are constructed and negotiated, to assume the phenotypical aspects of bodies are always the most imperious markers of Otherness. To develop this point further, it is appropriate to introduce how respondents read the Dolce & Gabbana advertisement, also included in the sample of images presented to participants (see Figure 2). While participants purported to be uncomfortable with the amount of shiny male flesh on display, referring to the bodies as “gay” and “vile”, these bodies evoked a number of tactical responses that were deployed to Other the men in the photo. For instance, while these men were described as “pretty much ... white” (David), it was noticeable that participants were keen to mark these footballing bodies as, distinctively, “Italian” bodies: Paul described the athletes as “Poxy<sup>1</sup> Italian footballers”, as opposed to simply ‘poxy footballers’, and Sam labelled them as “The Dolce & Gabbana, Italian gay boys”. Hence, these choice descriptions, intended as homophobic and jingoistic insults, are linguistic turns that serve to distinguish aspirational normative white (Anglo) masculinities from an imagined white Italian masculinity.

### Figure 2 “CALCIO”

To further this assumption, Sebastian is keen to proclaim national, cultural and ethnic differences, which serve to distance him from these particular men:

*... the majority of footballers nowadays I don't think give off a fairly masculine kind of image, especially Italian footballers [Researcher: OK, why do you say that?] Because again a lot of them it's about the posing or whatever else, but it's like fashion-led kind of stuff and a lot of acting and falling over and whatever else ... The Italian one, I'll go back to that one again, to me that does look very like an Italian kind of pose, but then again we've all been on the beach and stuff and we've seen Italian guys walking around, they do like their tight shorts and they are to a certain extent, you know, do look fairly similar to that dark haired, you know, they do look like if you had to pick a race for [the*

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<sup>1</sup> Poxy – a generally derogatory adverb used in Britain.

*men in the D&G image] you probably would pick it as being Italian. They do live up, I think, to the stereotype of [how] you'd [expect] an Italian person to look.*

Here, Sebastian questions the status of football, more broadly, as a proving ground for dominant heteromasculinities, as did a number of other respondents; however he is particularly keen to draw attention to Italian men's football as a culture harbouring a *natural* sporting ethos he understood as strange, bizarre, Other. He makes reference to "posing", "fashion" and "falling over" (a reference to 'diving', a form of gamesmanship) as stereotypical features of Italian men's football. Similar criticisms were levelled at Ronaldo:

**Jason:** *[Ronaldo's] attitude's all wrong. Good player, fantastic player but he's immature I think ... The stuff he does with...like the celebrations, and diving and I think he has took [sic] a step too far with a lot of celebrations, and he does go over the top. I think he is just immature.*

**Paul:** *[Ronaldo] comes across as a bit arrogant, cocky. All those step overs and that are just, just pointless to me.*

**Sebastian:** *[I] can't stand [Ronaldo] and again I think he's someone who's very good at what he does but he's throwing it in everyone's face, kind of thing.*

These comments are commonly heard in the UK in relation to Italian, Spanish, and most South American leagues/ countries, and resonant with other descriptions of Ronaldo. One British-based Manchester United fan, for instance, scoffs that Ronaldo is a "preening, perma-tanned, posturing, petulant prick"<sup>61</sup>. Through an essentialist discussion of the dissimilarities between male European football cultures then, participants expressed openly racist, xenophobic and homophobic views which position Ronaldo, and other football players like him, at the peripheries of whiteness and outside dominant, socially acceptable performances of white, heterosexual (Anglo) masculinities.

Flamboyancy, ostentatiousness and theatrics then, which are behaviours traditionally anathema to white, heterosexual, working-class, British men's 'determined', 'solid' and 'gritty' approach to football, were overwhelmingly condemned and often cited as definitive characteristics of male, "foreign" (Ashley), white, Southern European football players. In this sense, the differences in "attitude", which Ronaldo and the Italian football players were reported to embody, signal the complexities of "political projects of belonging"<sup>62</sup> and the multiple sites of identity (gendered, classed, sexualised and racialised) that the white men in this study drew upon in order to negotiate notions of 'us' and 'them'. These readings of Ronaldo enable us to illustrate the contingent nature of whiteness and that embodied performances of 'race' are not only slippery and contestable, but are continually challenged, inscribed, confirmed and undermined by nationality and regionality.

## **Conclusion**

The discussions that were summoned by readings of Ronaldo contest the notion that racism is a practice that 'whites do to blacks'. A misreading of this argument positions all those perceived as white people as the main perpetrators of old, colour-based and emergent racisms, which not only perpetuates an unhelpful black-white dualism but also overlooks the subtle and contingent nature of racialised processes and intersections of how 'race' is done through gender, and other subjectivities. We are thus critical of reading racism(s) and privilege, and therefore whiteness, from within a black-white paradigm and warn against this reductionism: to ignore the multiple subjectivities of those people perceived as white and the complex social and cultural transformations, indicative of late modernity, is to oversimplify racialised relationships of power and the pervasiveness of intra-racial as well as inter-racial racism. This paper advocates therefore a move beyond a simple 'Black men are powerless and white men are powerful' paradigm, which is not the same as to argue that this may never be the case, so as to understand better the socio-historical *circumstances* and cultural *conditions* in which particular men and intersecting identities are (dis)empowered in sporting contexts.



Mac an Ghaill<sup>63</sup> argues that “new migrants”, “illegal’ immigrants”, “refugees”, “asylum seekers”, “gypsies and travellers” and “the Irish” are but a few white communities that, at various moments in time, have not been granted access to the same privileges as other white people. And, as has been argued above, white people in sport and leisure, rather than existing as a homogenous group, are also divided by whitenesses of different values<sup>64</sup>. Here it is imperative to acknowledge the plurality of whiteness to avoid what Mac an Ghaill<sup>65</sup> calls “racism without race” which is a tendency to overlook xenophobic, jingoistic and other racialised forms of oppression simply because these ‘new’ incarnations of racism do not fit neatly with ‘old’ colour-based racisms. The use of whiteness to include/empower and exclude/disempower in this study is an indicator of this. This assertion is certainly not to be read as a call to ignore the needs of Black people in football, or sport more broadly, quite the opposite; however, it is to suggest that future explorations of whiteness as contingent, and problematic, is another means toward dismantling the black-white binary which shapes overwhelmingly popular discourses of racism and how it affects differently a diverse array of people in football, at all levels.

While we are keen to illustrate the contingent nature of whiteness and how it is that footballers like Ronaldo are positioned both as (peripherally) white and Other, at the same moment, this assertion should not be taken as a call for (a) scholars to acknowledge the glorious overhaul of white supremacist systems, which some post-race discourses seem to have already welcomed, or (b) to provide support for the notion of the ‘white victim’. That is because, importantly, the ambiguous positioning of white people as Other inevitably creates a dilemma for those claiming white racial identities, such as the men interviewed in this study, inasmuch as “[t]he enemy is never white”<sup>66</sup>. While it is common for white men to evoke ‘race’ as the reason for other racialised groups’ excellence or shortcomings - for instance, black people are deemed to be strong and quick *because* of their ‘race’ or South Asian’s are supposedly poor footballers *because* they are Asian<sup>67</sup> - these white British male participants did not attribute Ronaldo’s idiosyncrasies to whiteness *per se* but more to other ‘ethnic’ differences that were supposedly manifest in their performance of masculinity. That is, the identities of Ronaldo and the Italian football players, marked out as points of misidentification, were “subsumed in a nationality or ideology ... defined as antithetical to whiteness”<sup>68</sup>. In

other terms, references to Ronaldo as “Mediterranean”, “cocky” or even what could be described as a ‘Dulux swatch’ distinction of an *appearance* of white, or as one participant suggests *he should be in a third pile*. To the Italian football players as “Italian” and “gay”, serves both to deconstruct and fragment the social category ‘white people’ and to locate undesirable characteristics inside ethnic, cultural, gendered and sexualised discourses, allowing ideological versions of whiteness to retain ‘racial superiority’. In this sense, some white men may indeed be shifted to the peripheries of whiteness, or even outside it altogether, denying equal, universal access to the private club of whiteness, but Otherness, importantly, for the participants of this study, was never signalled solely by whiteness.

Cristiano Ronaldo proved to be an enigmatic figure whose representations, read from (white male) British perspectives, evoked numerous and often conflicting commentaries, descriptions and interpretations. Ronaldo emerged, throughout the research, as the best football player in the world with the worst approach to the game; a peripheral white person whose whiteness was contestable; a ‘Mediterranean’ from a territory in the Atlantic Ocean; a Portuguese, born and raised on a Portuguese island, considered “*kind of Hispanic*”; a ‘white body’ with ‘dark skin’; and a heterosexual man whose performance of masculinity was often read as emasculate. Ronaldo was both revered and ridiculed in the same moment. In sum, the paper reveals the contradictory nature of audience interpretations of Ronaldo and Other white identities. These realities enable us to understand better the complex contingent nature of whiteness while illustrating how intersecting racialised and masculine identities are marked and negotiated through football discourses.

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<sup>1</sup> Chadwick and Burton, *From Beckham to Ronaldo*, 2008; Papp-Váry, *The Use of Sports Celebrities in Advertising*, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Cashmore and Cleland, *Fans, Homophobia and Masculinities in Association Football*, 2012; Cole, *Jocks in Jocks: Sportsmen and Underwear Advertising*, 2014. Hall and Gough, *Magazine and Reader Constructions of ‘Metrosexuality’ and Masculinity*, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Carrington, *Fear of a Black Athlete*, 2002a; Carrington, *Race, Representation and the Sporting Body*, 2002b; Carrington and McDonald, ‘Race,’ *Sport and British Society*, 2001; Hylton, *Race and Sport*, 2009; Vincent and Harris, *They Think It’s All Dover!’ Popular Newspaper Narratives and Images About the English Football Team and (Re)Presentations of National Identity During Euro*, 2013.

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- <sup>4</sup> Carrington, *What's the Footballer Doing Here?* 2008, 427.
- <sup>5</sup> Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters. The Social Construction of Whiteness*, 1993; Jensen, *The Heart of Whiteness : Confronting Race, Racism, and White Privilege*, 2005.
- <sup>6</sup> Harris, *Whiteness as Property*, 1993.
- <sup>7</sup> Scheurich (1998, cited in Leonardo, 2004: 138)
- <sup>8</sup> Hartigan, *Establishing the Fact of Whiteness*, 1997, 496.
- <sup>9</sup> Garner, *The Uses of Whiteness: What Sociologists Working on Europe Can Draw from Us Research on Whiteness*, 2006; Garner, *Whiteness: An Introduction*, 2007.
- <sup>10</sup> Miles and Brown, *Racism*, 101.
- <sup>11</sup> Hall, *The Spectacle of the 'Other'*, 2002; Stone et al., "*White Men Can't Jump*": Evidence for the Perceptual Confirmation of Racial Stereotypes Following a Basketball Game, 1997.
- <sup>12</sup> Hylton, *Race and Sport*, 2009; Long and Hylton, *Shades of White*, 2002.
- <sup>13</sup> Garner, *Whiteness: An Introduction*, 2007; Leonardo, *The Color of Supremacy: Beyond the Discourse of 'White Privilege*, 2004.
- <sup>14</sup> Mills, *Racial Exploitation and the Wages of Whiteness*, 2004.
- <sup>15</sup> Gillborn, *Education Policy as an Act of White Supremacy*, 2005.
- <sup>16</sup> Ansley, *White Supremacy (and What We Should Do About It)*, 1997, 592.
- <sup>17</sup> Astaire, *Sol searching: Authorised biography*, 2014.
- <sup>18</sup> BBC, *Sol Campbell: England captaincy race claim stuns former FA chief*, 2014.
- <sup>19</sup> hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black.*, 1989, 113.
- <sup>20</sup> Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 2003)
- <sup>21</sup> Bradbury, *Institutional Racism, Whiteness and the under-Representation of Minorities in Leadership Positions in Football in Europe*, 2013; Burdsey, *Obstacle Race*, 2004; King, *Offside Racism: Playing the White Man*, 2004a.
- <sup>22</sup> King, *Play the White Man: The Theatre of Racialised Performance in the Institutions of Soccer*, 2000, 5.
- <sup>23</sup> Bonilla-Silva, *The Linguistics of Color Blind Racism: How to Talk Nasty About Blacks without Sounding "Racist"*, 2002; Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi, *Anything but Racism: How Sociologists Limit the Significance of Racism*, 2008; Hartigan, *Establishing the Fact of Whiteness*, 1997; hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, 1992.
- <sup>24</sup> Rabaka, *The Souls of White Folk: W.E.B. Du Bois's Critique of White Supremacy and Contributions to Critical White Studies*, 2007, 2.
- <sup>25</sup> Doob, *The White Racist Movement: Its Revelation*, 2002; Glover, *Ugly on the Diamonds: An Examination of White Privilege in Youth Baseball*, 2007; Leonardo, *The Color of Supremacy: Beyond the Discourse of 'White Privilege*, 2004; McDonald, *Mapping Whiteness and Sport*, 2005; McIntosh, *White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack*, 1989; Mills, *White Ignorance*, 2007.
- <sup>26</sup> Mac an Ghaill, *Contemporary Racisms and Ethnicities: Social and Cultural Transformations*, 1999; Mac an Ghaill, *The Irish in Britain: The Invisibility of Ethnicity and Anti-Irish Racism*, 2000; Mac an Ghaill, *British Critical Theorists: The Production of the Conceptual Invisibility of the Irish Diaspora*, 2001; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, *Gender, Culture and Society*, 2007; Nayak, *White Lives*, 2005; Nayak, *After race*, 2006.
- <sup>27</sup> Garner, *The Uses of Whiteness: What Sociologists Working on Europe Can Draw from Us Research on Whiteness*, 2006; Hylton, *Race and Sport*, 2009; Mac an Ghaill, *Contemporary Racisms and Ethnicities: Social and Cultural Transformations*, 1999; Mac an Ghaill, *The Irish in Britain: The Invisibility of Ethnicity and Anti-Irish Racism*, 2000.
- <sup>28</sup> Nayak, *After Race*, 2006, 417.
- <sup>29</sup> Satzewich, *Whiteness Limited*, 2006: 276.

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- <sup>30</sup> Lewis, Long and Hylton, *Integration and Othering: The Experiences of Black and White New Migrants*, 2012; Long, Hylton, Lewis, Spracklen, and Ratna, *Space for Inclusion? The Construction of Sport and Leisure Spaces as Places for Migrant Communities*, 2011.
- <sup>31</sup> Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 1991; Teixeira and Rogers, *America's Forgotten Majority: Why the White Working Class Still Matters*, 2000; Evans, *Educational Failure and Working Class White Children in Britain*, 2006.
- <sup>32</sup> Bérubé, *How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White It Stays*, 2003; Teunis, *Sexual Objectification and the Construction of Whiteness in the Gay Male Community*, 2007.
- <sup>33</sup> Dyer, *White*, 1997; Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, 1993; Travers, *Women's Ski Jumping, the 2010 Olympic Games, and the Deafening Silence of Sex Segregation, Whiteness, and Wealth*, 2011; Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History*, 1992)
- <sup>34</sup> Mac an Ghaill, *Contemporary Racisms and Ethnicities*, 1999, 142.
- <sup>35</sup> Nayak, *After Race*, 2006, 426.
- <sup>36</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, 1993
- <sup>37</sup> Nayak, *White Lives*, 2005: 153.
- <sup>38</sup> Gillborn, *Education Policy as an Act of White Supremacy*, 2005, 489.
- <sup>39</sup> (Thompson, *Summary of Whiteness Theory*, 2001)
- <sup>40</sup> King, 'Play the White Man', 2002; King, *Offside Racism*, 2004a; King, *Race and Cultural Identity*, 2004b.
- <sup>41</sup> Burdsey, *Obstacle Race*, 2004; Burdsey, *British Asians and Football*, 2007. , 2011)
- <sup>42</sup> Ladson-Billings and Donnor, *Waiting for the Call: The Moral Activist Role of Critical Race Theory Scholarship*, 2008, 68.
- <sup>43</sup> Lawrence, *On White Men's Representations of 'Race', Whiteness, Masculinities and 'Otherness'*, 2013.
- <sup>44</sup> Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, 1993
- <sup>45</sup> Brooks and Hébert, *Gender, Race, and Media Representation*, 2006
- <sup>46</sup> Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 1996, 56.
- <sup>47</sup> Yosso, *Critical Race Media Literacy*, 2002
- <sup>48</sup> Marshall, *Sampling for qualitative research*, 1996.
- <sup>49</sup> Hall, *The Spectacle of the 'Other'*, 1997.
- <sup>50</sup> Carrington, *Fear of a Black Athlete*, 2002a; Carrington, *Race, Representation and the Sporting Body*, 2002b.
- <sup>51</sup> Hylton, *Race and Sport*, 2009
- <sup>52</sup> Ruiz, *Best Entertainer: Cristiano Ronaldo*, 2009, 36.
- <sup>53</sup> *ibid*: 36
- <sup>54</sup> *ibid*.:36
- <sup>55</sup> *ibid*.: 36
- <sup>56</sup> Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture*, 2002; Kimmel, *The History of Men*, 2005; Mac an Ghaill, *Understanding Masculinities*, 1996; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, *Gender, Culture and Society*, 2007; Mangan, *Christ and the Imperial Playing Fields*, 2006.
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- <sup>59</sup> Du Bois, *Announcement*, 2007 [1897], 8.
- <sup>60</sup> Nayak, *After Race*, 2006.
- <sup>61</sup> Wagg, *Cristiano Meets Mr Spleen*, 2010, 919-920
- <sup>62</sup> Yuval-Davis, *The Politics of Belonging : Intersectional Contestations*, 2011, vii.

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- <sup>63</sup> Mac an Ghaill. *Contemporary Racisms and Ethnicities: Social and Cultural Transformations*, 1999, 77.
- <sup>64</sup> Long and Hylton, *Shades of White*, 2002.
- <sup>65</sup> Mac an Ghaill, *Contemporary Racisms and Ethnicities: Social and Cultural Transformations*, 1999, 77-80.
- <sup>66</sup> Ladson-Billings and Donnor, *Waiting for the Call : The Moral Activist Role of Critical Race Theory Scholarship*, 2008, 68.
- <sup>67</sup> Lawrence, *Representation, Racialisation and Responsibility*, 2011, Lawrence, *On White Men's Representations of 'Race', Whiteness, Masculinities and 'Otherness'*, 2013.
- <sup>68</sup> Ladson-Billings and Donnor, *Waiting for the Call : The Moral Activist Role of Critical Race Theory Scholarship*, 2008, 286.

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