‘(Simply) the Best’, or Remembering When Tina Turner Met the Winfield Cup: Nostalgia and the Construction of Authenticity in Rugby League Online Spaces

Introduction

Tina Turner was not a rugby league fan at all when she was hired to sing her 1986 song ‘What You Get is What You See’ in a 1989 marketing campaign for the Australian professional rugby league competition, known then, as the New South Wales Rugby League (NSWRL) Winfield Cup. This promo video was played on Australian television during adverts and on sports programmes and even the news, as part of an attempt to get more female fans and families to watch the game live or on their televisions. The NSWRL were so pleased by the video that featured Turner and an assortment of rugby league players, that they brought her back for a second promotional video in 1990 entitled ‘Simply the Best’, which used her 1989 single ‘The Best’ (a cover version of the song originally performed by Bonnie Tyler in 1988). Like ‘What You Get is What You See’, in ‘Simply the Best’ there are shots of fans wearing their team colours (male and female, young and old) getting excited about the match. There are players getting sweaty doing training moves in the gym and outside. Then there are clips of teams playing hard against each other, players scoring tries or making big hits as they tackle others to the floor. This promotional video became even more of a hit than the 1989 marketing video, and the song became associated with the NSWRL and its successor the Australian Rugby League (ARL) through the nineties. The title of the promo video even became the title of the song in popular memory, and Turner released a version of the song ahead of the NSWRL season in 1992 with Australian rock singer Jimmy Barnes that adopted the title ‘(Simply) the Best’.

These marketing videos, starring Turner, represented a moment in Australian rugby league when the game was expanding into new cities and states, but when it was still strongly

associated with its working-class roots in Sydney. The videos were watched by rugby league fans in England. Since then, the videos have become a contested part of rugby league's shared history and are still widely referenced and talked about. The aim of this paper, then, is to explore how rugby league fans online remember this moment, how rugby league fans talk about and make sense of changes to the game since the 1980s. Specifically, we are interested in how fans use these videos to discuss how rugby league has changed in Australia, and how these changes are contested by those fans. We will use comments below the line on YouTube and in two public fan chat-rooms to explore how remembering the video constructs a shared myth of Australian and English white working-class masculinity. We cannot know the actual identities of fans in online spaces, but we can show how fans perform belonging, community and identity. These are people who identify as Australian or English rugby-league fans by performing those roles and owning the myths and the history of rugby league. We argue that while alternative constructions of Australian and English masculinity and national identity are present in this nostalgia, there is a yearning for a time – reflected in the imagery of the videos - when hegemonic masculinity intersected with white, working-class nationalist identities reflected in the imagery in the promotional videos (Pini, McDonald, and Mayes, 2012; Waling, 2019). Before we turn to the theoretical framework and the methods, it is necessary to explain rugby league's history and development in England and Australia.

Rugby league was created out of a split with rugby union in England in 1895, when Northern rugby union (NRU) teams split away over a series of arguments about broken-time payments: money northern working-class players needed to be able to play. At the time, the NRU clubs were attracting thousands of paying customers to their fixtures, and the fans were working-class like most of the players. The NRU became defined as professional, northern, working-class by their own supporters, and by their southern elite amateur rivals in the English Rugby Football Union (Collins, 1999, 2006). The NRU made a number of key changes to their

code of rugby in the years after the split, abolishing line-outs, reducing players to thirteen on each side, and introducing the 'play-the-ball' for re-starting play instead of the rucks and maul of rugby union. Tensions over professionalism emerged in Australia, where some rugby union players in Sydney in 1907 decided to leave union and to create a professional rugby league that played to the new NRU rules. These players and the clubs they formed were working-class in nature, just like those in the north of England, and the professional rugby league (the NSWRL) became the focus of large numbers of working-class fans in Sydney (Collins, 2006; Phillips, 2004; Rowe, 1997). As rugby union spread around the world, supported by the British Empire and its cultural and political hegemony, rugby league (as the NRU version became known) was marginalised, and brutally repressed (as in Vichy France where it was banned, and in South Africa and other places where attempts to set up rugby league were crushed – Collins, 2015). In the 1960s and 1970s it survived as a semi-professional sport in a few towns and cities in the north of England, with a few amateur teams. It was played semi-professionally in the south of France and to an extent in parts of New Zealand, but only prospered in New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland where the NSWRL and the Queensland Rugby League (QRL) existed as professional leagues, under which hundreds of semi-pro and amateur teams prospered in working-class communities in the cities and in the country (Collins, 2015).

By the 1980s, the NSWRL and QRL were drawing in millions of dollars of sponsorship and broadcasting money (Rowe, 1997). The creation of State of Origin – a three-match series between Queensland and New South Wales where the players are the best professionals in the NSWRL representing their home states - created a ratings success as players fought each other as well as played some spectacular rugby league (Yeates, 1995). Then the formation of the ARL, which included teams from Queensland and beyond, seemed to give rugby league in Australia a secure future. Rugby league expanded in Australia in the early nineties, with elite teams appearing around the country and in New Zealand. Despite the schism brought about by

Super League and News Corp, rugby league has continued to rival Australian Football League (AFL) in terms of viewing figures, memberships, sponsorship and broadcasting deals. But in recent years, the NRL (the successor to the ARL) has had to respond to a number of challenges: egregious player behaviour on and off the pitch (Kelly, Weeks and Chien, 2018; Packard Hill and Fuller, 2018); and the changing nature of Sydney and Australia (Waling, 2019), as both become more cosmopolitan, polyethnic and bourgeois (Hawkes, 2018; Williamson, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical framework is constructed from an intersectional application of critical theories of gender, race, class and nation (Yuval-Davis, 2006). In this section, we explore each in turn and relate them to rugby league. Following Connell (1987, 1995), we assert that gender and masculinity are socially constructed. Connell (1987) showed that the gender order worked to keep men in power and women in their place. Connell (1995) showed that different masculinities exist at any given moment, but historically and at the time Connell was writing, a dominant heterosexual form of masculinity called hegemonic masculinity existed which ensured men who did not fit the norm, as well as women, were given limited power and status. According to Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinity was reproduced through the hegemonic control of men in political spaces, and it was used to normalize essential differences between men and women. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) articulate it on reflection:

> Hegemonic masculinity was understood as the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue. Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities ... But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position

> themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men ... Hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion. These concepts were abstract rather than descriptive, defined in terms of the logic of a patriarchal gender system. They assumed that gender relations were historical, so gender hierarchies were subject to change. Hegemonic masculinities therefore came into existence in specific circumstances and were open to historical change.

In the first decade of this century it felt that such hegemonic masculinity was no longer in power, challenged as it was by societal changes, increased mobilities and post-industrialization (Urry, 2002). Indeed, Anderson's work has shown how different, more inclusive forms of masculinity can be constructed in sports such as rugby (Anderson and McGuire, 2010; McCormack and Anderson, 2010). But in recent years what is problematically called toxic masculinity has come back to shape debates in society about the power of men (Elliott, 2018). Hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity, then, continues to be re-produced and normalized.

It is also clear that race and ethnicity are also socially constructed, as is shown by the work of Critical Race Theory (Parker, 2019), and by scholars such as Gilroy (1992, 2000). More recently, Saini (2019) explores the history and science of race, shows that race continues to be salient as a scientific and political construction. The long shadow of imperialism and slavery mean there are still inequalities and racism in the modern nation-state. Whiteness is socially constructed, and this construction is made invisible by the power of hegemony (Spracklen, 2013). Minority ethnic people of colour are Othered by their skin (Gilroy, 2000). Furthermore, national identity is equally the invention of politicians and other elites, using myths and invented traditions to make a fictive community (Anderson, 1983; Hobsbawm and

Ranger, 1983). Social class is also party socially constructed, but there are material conditions of inequality that underpin that social construction. Sport, music and leisure have been shown to be spaces where intersectional identities are constructed and contested, where belonging and exclusion work at the symbolic boundaries of imaginary community (Spracklen, 2009, 2016; Spracklen, Timmins and Long, 2010). Modern sports are particularly egregious for the way they have been deliberately contrived to promote hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity, whiteness, elitism and nationalism (Pringle and Hickey, 2010; Spaaij, Farquharson and Marjoribanks, 2015). Falcous (2007) shows how rugby league has been used to defend and define a particularly marginal working-class identity in New Zealand. Yeates (1995) highlights the way rugby league in the 1980s and 1990s was hyped in the media as a man's game for strong, heterosexual men who became archetypes of hegemonic masculinity. Nash (2017) shows how hegemonic masculinity might be challenged in Australia and in Australian sport. Hawkes (2018) looks specifically at the experience of non-white Pacific Islander players and the hyper-masculinity of Australian rugby league. But Australian sport, as Waling suggests (2019), is still central to the worldview of the 'good ol' bloke', the working-class, white man who defines the symbolic boundaries of the imaginary community. In Spracklen, Timmins and Long (2010), the authors show how whiteness, blackness and hegemonic masculinity intersected with class and northernness in rugby league in England. In this paper, then, we are interested in exploring the salience of memories about rugby league in the eighties and nineties in the formation of race, gender, class and nation in the imaginary community of rugby league today – as they are performed online.

Methods

We are very familiar with rugby league as we are both fan-insiders, with long experience of following rugby league in England and Australia (Spracklen, Timmins, and Long, 2010). Our

location as insiders allowed us to identify the two Tina Turner promo videos as important then and now as a symbol of the strength of the popularity of rugby league in Australia, and indeed Australian rugby league in other places around the world where there is rugby league played. We cannot know the identity of any individual online, or what their relationship might be with rugby league. But if the people talking about the songs and the videos in ways that show knowledge of following or watching rugby league are Russian spies or bots (or indeed rugby union fans trying to bring rugby league into disrepute), it still shows us that these are people who want to identify with Australian rugby league, and who want others to identify them as 'genuine' fans. We sampled the comments under three videos. The first was the 1989 campaign video.[1] The second was the 1990 'Simply the Best' video.[2] The final one was a 1993 live rendition of the song by Tina Turner live in Sydney.[3] We also explored for specific comments about the 'Simply the Best' video and campaign at two fan site forums online: totalrl.com based in the UK, and league-unlimited.com from Australia. We used Discourse Tracing (LeGreco and Tracy, 2009) to make sense of the identity-work by the fans making these comments. That is, we developed an understanding of the micro, meso and macro discourses present in the texts through close and repeated reading.

All material is written without any attempt to copy-edit and proof-read, as this allows us to explore how people articulate their views. While there are strong ethical arguments to anonymise social media names and data (see the overview of the debate and the recommendations in Williams, Burnap, and Sloan, 2017), we follow Willis (2019) who returns to the principles and justifications of doing ethnography in public space to justify reporting the text and sources unaltered. We have supplied user-names as written, too, with the style and capitalisation, as this tells us something about how these fans are performing and constructing their identity.

Findings and Analysis

Overview

On the toltalrl.com public forum there is no discussion specifically about the video. But there is mention of the song being the best rugby league song, or the best song to use when teams are entering the field. In a discussion thread titled 'Music at games', for example, a user called DavidM explains that 'Simply the Best brings back the memories.[4] In other threads, Simply the Best is used to refer to players and matches when fans are listing their favourites. The song, the video and its meaning, then, is well understood.

On league-unlimited.com's forum there are threads specifically about the marketing video, and people reminiscing and agreeing it was indeed 'simply the best'. At the time before the Australian rugby league centenary season in 2009 a number of fans used the forum to argue that '(Simply) the Best' had to be revived, with a new video and possibly a new version of the song with Turner on vocals. This year, it was reported on the forum that the NRL were exploring the possibility of celebrating the 30th anniversary of the campaign by bringing the song and Turner back in some capacity.[5] As of writing, 61 fans have responded to the question 'Do you want Tina Turner back' and 39 (63.1%) have said yes. The discussion includes a number of sexist comments about Turner ('old hag in a hookers costume'), and some nostalgic ones for the times when rugby league was about collecting 'footy cards'.

The greatest amount of comment and argument can be found at the three YouTube videos in the comments-below-the-line. At the time of our sampling exercise (15 September 2019, the date from which all lengths of time cited need to be calculated), the user statistics were as follows: the 1989 video had 215,528 views, 1,300 likes and 99 comments; the 1990 'Simply the Best' video had 542,779 views, 487 likes and 240 comments; and the 1993 Live at Sydney video had 105,331 views, 605 likes and 70 comments. Interestingly, then, the 1989 video has more likes, even though it has not been viewed by as many people as the 1990 video.

This may be because the 1990 marketing campaign and song were more successful in raising awareness of rugby league's link to Turner, and more people online have been drawn to it as music or sports fans. But fans like the 1989 video more because somehow viewers online want to persuade us they have the right taste and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) to choose the 1989 video. This, after all, is the source of the link between Turner and rugby league, and the herald of rugby league's rising fortunes in Australia in the early nineties. In the rest of this section, we highlight four themes present in the YouTube discussions: nostalgia; class; race and nation; and masculinity.

Nostalgia

Most of the comments about the video content and style, across all three videos, were positive. People identifying as fans of Turner, or pop music of the era, were obviously very positive as the videos allow them to re-construct and mythologize their own earlier lives. All comments used the mistaken song name, 'Simply the Best'. Nostalgia for the music of the period and Turner's performances, then, is important even if song titles are mis-remembered.

Suzi Shark, for example, presumably a woman who supports the Cronulla Sharks (or who wants us to think she does) posting under the 1993 live video two years ago, says:

> bring her back. She was simply the best

bloodnut121, posting under the 1990 promo video one year ago, says:

> great era of rugby league, as long as it had Tina turner, it was good league

bloodnut121 is a fan with a hegemonically masculine user-name, someone who is crazy for blood. This might be vampire, but more likely the fan is someone who likes the taste and

smell and sight of blood in their sport, leisure and culture. For Suzi Shark, Turner was 'simply the best', a pun that also evokes a nostalgia that believes rugby league needs the magic of Turner and these marketing videos so it can return to that era. For bloodnut121, it was specifically a 'great era of rugby league'. Others agree with Suzi Shark that the NRL needed to return to the style of these videos, maybe even using Turner and 'Simply'. Where commentators on the videos argue against re-making them the argument seems to be that they could never be copied because the world, and rugby league, have changed.[6]

Nobody mentioned any specific campaigns run in recent years as a comparison even though there have been video promotions for the NRL and State of Origin. What matters to the people expressing a view is these videos represent a time when rugby league was run by people who supposedly cared for the game, authentic fans of the game and not directors interested only in profit margins. This is false nostalgia, of course. The Winfield Cup was sold to television networks. It was named by the tobacco corporation that bought the rights. Australian rugby league in the eighties had already becoming top-heavy, with the Winfield Cup squeezing players and supporters out of the QRL and country leagues in rural New South Wales. But the nostalgia that this was a better age is dominant. Someone called IAN JOHN MARKLEY (a man or someone passing as a man) writes this under the 1993 live video five months ago:

> Great days of football can we have this passion back for the game and people music crowd the greatest game ever we need this back now in society

This fan believes that the game and society were better back in the eighties because he believes people had 'passion' for rugby league (football), for music, and for each other.

Class

Anthony Barwick, posting under the 1989 promo video, says:

> I was a North Sydney Bears fan. My dad took us to all their games as a kid and we weren't rich or posh, we just loved our team. We were the supporters who went to the footy regardless of the wether and the travel. The Bears were screwed over cause they didn't have that working class image like so many league teams, plus they satyed loyal to the ARL at the time and where did that get us? A foundation team that satyae dloyal and got fucked off inot oblivion as a result The problem with rugby League is that's it's agreat product, run by small minded bogans. The Sydney Swans probably gained about 10000 fans thanks ti the NRL as well. I still love the game and watch. I still go to the occasional Tigers game at Leichart but there is no passion anymore and that's a bloody hard thing to get over.

North Sydney Bears were removed from the NRL in 1999. This fan tells us that he believes the club was 'screwed over' because they were based in a middle-class area of Sydney, and the people who ran the game wanted to keep the other clubs in Sydney that had working-class heritage and working-class support. No one denies his claims about class online: the Bears were from a more bourgeois end of the city compared to the working-class districts that still nurture the game's Sydney clubs. Again, the idea that the game had more passion at the time of the videos re-appears. This is the passion of authentic rugby-league fans and authentic rugby-league players: this can only be the imaginary community of rugby league, the idea that working-class men created the game for each other and gave it a moral foundation based on the honour of trade unions and friendly societies (Collins, 1999, 2006). The 'bogan' makes an appearance here (Pini, McDonald, and Mayes, 2012; Waling, 2019). The fan is saying it appeals too much to a sense of Australian white working-classness, as with marketing campaigns aimed at relatively wealthy bogans (Pini, McDonald, and Mayes, 2012). This fan

thinks the working-class bogans running the game are like stupid, flashy men in too-tight suits selling used-cars (Waling, 2019). The stereotype of the bogan of course is unrefined and unsophisticated, often eating pies in a singlet or vest. This bogan is not a bogan in a suit, but this fan thinks the people running the game are just bogans-in-suits, people who do not care for rugby league's community and Australian, people who do not have education and taste, people who just want to make money.

Race and nation

Under the 1990 video, a commentator called Danezim says:

> who gives a shit bout wogball, im AUSSIE and a new south welshman, League is king where i live thats all that matters to me....the rest of the world is infected with rabies too, doesnt make it good does it

This person calls soccer 'wogball', a racist term used in Australia by people who think soccer is a game for minority ethnic communities. He wants us to know he is proud that he is Australian, from the country where rugby league is strong. This is the most sickening prejudice encountered below-the-line, but there are examples of others where rugby league past and present are refracted through the lens of race and nation. The physical appearance of the players with eighties hairstyles is discussed. Then comparisons are made with players of today by discussing the tattoos that many current NRL players have on their bodies. Somebody called Scott Dorman, posting under the 1989 promo video four years ago, says:

> Isn't it refreshing seeing ripped althletes minus the freak tattoos every man and their dog are getting these days

Someone called Sven warner replies one year ago:

Most of those players who were those tattoes, are only doing it for the street cred, or trying to maintain their hip hop image, or a false sense of gangasta street cred

Then James Broughton replies one year ago:

svenwarner What about ones with tribal tattoos...Theyre representing their heritage nt some image although id imagine not many of them would understand the meanings behind those tatts neither.

Other comments show support for the original comment. The idea that somehow it was refreshing to see players without tattoos perhaps reflects the idea the commentator has regarding the changes in the diversity of the game. One reply makes reference to tribal tattoos, the other used a term often applied to people copying rap singers, or Hollywood images of modern gangsters (Goodrich, 2019). Both indicate, by agreeing with the first, that the players in the video, with their lack of tattoos, is refreshing, indeed preferable, because Australian rugby league's players are now too *non*-white. The number of Indigenous Australians, Pacific Islanders, and New Zealand (NZ) Maoris currently playing in the NRL is higher now than it was in the 1990s. Players today often play for NSW or Queensland, a heritage nation they identity with when younger, or towards the idea of their career, and Australia or NZ if they reach the top of game and qualify (Hawkes, 2018). Andrew Fifita is perhaps a classic example of this modern phenomenon. He has played for NSW and Australia, the Indigenous Australian representative team and he also continues to play in the Koori Knockout Festival for Indigenous rugby league. He also played for Tonga in the last World Cup, and he continues to do so as his

grandfather is Tongan, whilst still in contention for NSW at State of Origin level. Often seen as a divisive figure due to playing style, he also is a good example of the modern day NRL player, born and raised in Sydney, with a much more diverse heritage. He adorns himself with tattoos reflecting his diverse heritage, supports the non-singing of the national anthem by Indigenous players, described winning the World Cup in 2014 playing for Australia as his proudest moment, then played for Tonga in 2017. The commentators show their preference for the era of the video by using the absence of tattoos, described as tribal by one, as being a better era, without talking about any playing related issues or comparisons. For these fans, rugby league now is seemingly tainted by the presence of difference: the rise in tribal tattoos that has occurred at the same time that Australia, Sydney and rugby league have become more multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan (Hawkes, 2018). It may just be a matter of aesthetics, but the second fan clearly links tattoos to the multi-ethnic, hybrid, urban popular culture of Australia.

Masculinity

Many comments are made that made comparisons between players of today, and men of today, with the players featured in the videos, or with men in society at large. Some are totally negative towards today's players, often mixing up issues of masculinity with changes in the game over the years, the most obvious being the absence of punching since the NRL (in 2014) made it an automatic offence punishable by sending off for punching. The comment below by AD2020 posted below the 1990 promo video one year ago is nostalgic for the days when Australian rugby league was notorious for the fighting on the pitch.

Soooo good. Also, Bring back the biff!

The reference is to a popular YouTube page called 'Bring Back the Biff', which was set up after a campaign and website emerged that wanted NRL and State of Origin to return to

the blood-soaked eighties and nineties. The YouTube page features videos of infamous fights and brutal tackles, mainly from State of Origin. The idea that players were tougher in the era of the videos features across many comments, not just those referring to the absence of fighting within the sport. State of Origin marketing campaigns over the years often featured fights and its common slogan still used today of 'mate against mate' is also read by many as meaning fighting, not just the game itself (Yeates, 2015). The absence of fighting is talked about even though the videos feature very little actual fighting. The speeded up action footage, with close up shots of tackling, makes the game look and feel as if you are near the action but it still only accounts for part of the videos, training montage, players in non-playing environments, and crowd shots almost equal the amount of playing footage but the sense that many think the game was played by tougher men, or that men were tougher in general seems to dominate. The fan who wants to 'bring back the biff' wants to reject the values of inclusive masculinity (Anderson and McGuire, 2010) and return to a society where men were men, and proved their hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity by hitting each other on the rugby league pitch (Connell, 1995).

The sense of there being a tougher game, or era, an almost purer form of rugby league prior to corporate takeover probably reflects the divisive Super League war in the late nineties, when the game briefly split between the ARL and Super League, many seeing the ARL as the traditional game (Rowe, 1997). This happened after the videos in our research, but its effect is still seen in the comment below posted by GodBothere11 under the 1990 promo video one year ago, which despite containing misinformation (sin bins and send offs still exist), it reflects a sense of lost identity for the game, and one which the post implies *used to exist*:

> Bring back the Bears, Wests, Steelers, Balmain, and the old league grounds. Get rid of of Gold Coast, Melbourne, New Zealand and Sydney unless they become East's again. Tell the corporate scum to sod off and lets us keep our traditional game. Rugby League

> was ruined by Murdoch and corporate controllers. Bring back sin bins and send offs, why do we have siisy refs for? Bring back herritage.

A sense of loss of an era, a loss of masculinity that existed both in the video and within the game at large, was discussed by many without giving reasons as to why they think that way. This fan attempts to complain that corporate interference and control had ruined the game and that as result referees had become softer, or to quote the pejorative *heteronormative* term, refs have become 'siisy'. Referees, in this fan's view, are not manly enough to be proper men, and are girls or homosexuals or some suspect other (Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). When masculinity is discussed, then, and statements made regarding loss of masculinity within the game, it is often misinformed, personal, or comparing what is seen on the video with a perception of the game today. Yet some fans say they do not watch the game anymore. As already shown, both positive and negative commentators under the three videos showed nostalgia for the era, the game of that era, a sense of community that some said does not now exist, and even the music itself being proof of the era being superior and that somehow things should be copied by today's game, or returned to in order that the game can be real again in their eyes. Players were seen as tougher, more masculine, and more authentic because of either the absence of tattoos or a sense of looking more Australian (Hawkes, 2018). That said, disagreement was evident, with the obvious comparison with today's game being made more positively in some cases. However, a strong theme as described previously was that each of the videos represented, without much real evidence, not just a better, more authentic era of the game, when it was played by tougher men, or traditional clubs, but that itself meant the era was better itself even amongst a few commentators who described themselves as not even being born when the video was made.

Discussion

Those rugby league fans (or people who choose to perform as these fans online) who like the three videos and the wider Australian rugby league campaigns in the late eighties and early nineties are inevitably nostalgic. The two songs, especially what everybody now knows just as 'Simply the Best', provide aural stimuli that evoke memories as effectively as the aroma of Proust's madeleine.[7] The videos show professional rugby league in the era as being global in its potential. At the time, before rugby union became professional, people thought this was proof that rugby league could expand and take on soccer as a global team sport. Australia was showing the way by inviting in a real global celebrity to headline their marketing campaign. They had invested in significant resources to produce a slick, marketing campaign and video that seemed to give Australian rugby league a lift as the NSWRL transformed into the ARL. Numbers of fans and teams increased across Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and even into the union-mad island nations of the South Pacific. Even in the north of England the RFL and fans were equally star-struck by Tina Turner and the ARL, determined to follow the Australian example. These were the years when clubs acquired nick-names and mascots, when the northern English rugby league switched to the summer to avoid the mud and rain that often ground the game to a halt, and for one brief moment looked as if it was to become a real European Super League of a handful of merged clubs combined with teams in places such as Paris, Dublin and Barcelona (Rowe, 1997).

So for rugby league fans around the world there is a good reason to feel this nostalgia, because it was the period when rugby league was expanding globally, and yet it was a time when the fans and the ruling governing bodies seemed to have a common interest in keeping rugby league sustainable. This was the period before Rupert Murdoch and the arrival of Super League, when he threw millions of dollars at players, clubs and governing bodies, splitting rugby league in Europe and Australasia for many years (Collins, 2006). This struggle over

control of the sport has not yet finished. Rugby league in the UK is still reliant on its relationship with Sky (even if Murdoch no longer owns that broadcaster). Rugby league in Australia is still following the logic of the Super League and News Corp, ruthlessly pursuing sponsorship and broadcasting, allowing the sports media and the viewers on television to dictate spending priorities. The NRL is determined to beat Aussie Rules on income and ratings, and that logic drives the spectacle of the State of Origin and Grand Final as sports mega-events. All this means that many fans of clubs and teams that are not in the top tier feel marginalised and unloved, and many players who do not make the top grade retire and do not go back to playing for their local team (Falcous, 2007; Hawkes, 2018).

We suggest that in sharing this nostalgic reaction, the fans are at work constructing (or inventing, or performing) their own identity in the imaginary community of rugby league (Spracklen, 2009, 2016; Spracklen, Timmins and Long, 2010), and the imagined communities of white, working-class Australia and northern England (Anderson, 1983). The imaginary community of rugby league is an imagined community with symbolic boundaries maintained by the people in it. Those symbolic boundaries provide entry points into the imaginary community, and there are multiple levels of access where fans have to perform to be accepted. The fans are performing (or faking) their belonging through sharing appreciation and knowledge of the videos and the marketing campaigns. The imagined part of the imaginary community of rugby league functions through the sharing of myths and invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983), such as the myth that rugby league is essentially a working-class game, or a game only played by working-class men in Sydney and the north of England. In the case of these videos and what they represent, the invented tradition is that rugby league was better in the late eighties before it sold its soul to Rupert Murdoch, and before the game in Australia became commodified. Tina Turner and Simply the Best could have been viewed as the beginning of the commodification of rugby league, certainly the campaigns and the videos

are products of instrumental rationality. But the moment is remembered as the time when rugby league was still about men giving their all, playing for pride in the jersey and the game rather than the millions an appearance in State of Origin might accrue. This is rugby league that is imagined to be still based in its white, working-class Sydney heartlands, and its white, working-class Yorkshire and Lancashire heartlands.

The imagined communities of white, working-class Australia and northern England are connected to the imaginary community of rugby league, and there is much overlap between them. But the imagined communities in Australia and northern England intersect with other leisure practices, cultural spaces and social constructions. Our research does not provide us with any discussion online that sheds light on the imagined community of northern England, with its myths of white working-class men doing work in the mills and pits (Spracklen, 2009, 2016; Spracklen, Timmins and Long, 2010). However, we can see in this research that the white, working-class imagined community of Australia is constructed and contested by fans debating the significance and memory of the Tina Turner marketing campaign. For some, it is their personal memory of being young, white working-class rugby league fans, and the video and song evoke the memories of that life. For others, there is regret that the white, working-class Australia of their youth, imagined in rugby league, has gone the way of traditional white male industries and occupations (Waling, 2019). Finally, for some there is an attempt to construct continuity, to say that rugby league and Australia are the same as they were in the eighties and early nineties: rugby league is still played by tough men who embody hegemonic masculinity and Australianness (Hawkes, 2018; Nash, 2017; Waling, 2019). In this way, some fans reject alternative forms of masculinity, especially inclusive masculinity (Anderson and McGuire, 2010).

Conclusion

Hegemonic masculinity, whiteness and working-classness are still strongly associated with rugby league in Australia, as our research shows. Some of the respondents may not be rugby league fans, but they do a convincing job of faking it: they know about Tina Turner's promotional videos, they know the history of the game in Australia and the ins-and-outs of its clubs and players. On balance, it seems to us that most of them, if not all, are indeed fans of Australian rugby league, or they would not be commenting on rugby league fan forums and on the three Tina Turner videos. If any are fakes, their performativity is authentic enough to show us what fakes know rugby league fans to care about. The arguments and performativity online demonstrate that rugby league fans think the game was and remains a working-class, white man's game, a bogan game, even if the 'suits' have taken it over. For some rugby league fans, there is an intersection today in their imaginaries of whiteness, nation, hegemonic masculinity and working-class identity. There is some overt racist argument below-the-line about non-white players being 'gangstas', but most of the racialisation operates in the implicit myths and assumptions about who is an authentic rugby league fan: rugby league is only for those who can demonstrate their membership of the imaginary community, which is as white as most of the players and fans in the three videos. This imaginary community in Australia maps onto the white working-class communities of Sydney and the Country, the towns and districts that have changed due to population decline or more recent inward migration of people from beyond Australia (Waling, 2019). Ironically, then, white fans remember the good old days by listening to an African-American singer and watching her interact with the mainly white rugby league heroes of their (imagined) youth.

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[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXIzp0ok24I.

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTgWxveYFBU.
[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-14FAwiWF1Q.
[4] https://www.totalrl.com/forums/index.php?/topic/316977-music-at-games/&tab=comments#comment-3761812.
[5] https://forums.leagueunlimited.com/threads/tina-turner.474369/.
[6] It was suggested that contemporary viewers demand instant gratification, not the slow-burn, feel-good of these two videos.
[7] Our own madeleine aromas in rugby league: wintergreen oil in the rub seemingly used by every rugby league player in the seventies and eighties.