Play, protest and pride: Un/happy queers of Proud to Play in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract
This article extends discussion of urban activism through paying attention to the emotional and embodied politics of a sports event. We draw on research of the 'Proud to Play Games', an inaugural regional multi-sports event held during the Auckland Pride Festival in Aotearoa New Zealand, 2016. Feminist and queer theories of emotion and affect – particularly the promise of happiness – produce nuanced understandings of urban gay pride events. We focus on the experiences of three Proud to Play participants as they illustrate the tensions of play/protest, happy/sad and pride/shame in Auckland. The portraits highlight: a homonormativity pursuit of happiness and youthful masculine athleticism; precarious happiness and oppositional lesbian desire; and, the pursuit of indigenous happiness. Through attention to affective and emotional politics, we demonstrate that Proud to Play can challenge heteronormative urban space by simultaneously fighting for a better future and making a claim for the right to be unhappy.

Keywords
affect, cities, emotion, gender, sexualities, sport, unhappy queer activism

摘要
本文通过关注体育赛事的情感化和具象化政治来扩展对城市行动主义的讨论。我们借鉴了对“以玩乐为荣”(Proud to Play Games)这一赛事的研究。这项地区性多项目体育赛事于2016年在新西兰奥特亚罗瓦(Aotearoa)举行的奥克兰骄傲节(Auckland Pride Festival)期间首次举办。情感和情爱的女权主义和酷儿(queer)理论（尤其是对幸福的承诺）产生了对城市同性恋骄傲活动的微妙理解。我们聚焦于三位“以玩乐为荣”参与者经历，他们展示了在奥克兰玩耍/抗议、快乐/悲伤和骄傲/羞耻之间的张力。这些画像凸显了：对幸福的同性恋范式化(homonormativity)追求和年轻男性的运动精神；不稳定的幸福和对立的女同性恋欲望；对本土幸福的追求。通过对情爱和情感政治的关注，我们证明了“以玩乐为荣”可以通过同时为更美好的未来而奋斗和主张“不幸福的权利”来挑战“异性恋范式”(heteronormative)的城市空间。

关键词
情爱、城市、情感、性别、性、运动，不幸福酷儿行动主义
Proud to Play is a charity organisation that hosted sporting events in the 2016 Auckland Pride Festival in Aotearoa New Zealand. Proud to Play aims to ‘promote inclusive sports and recreations in New Zealand’ (www.proudtoplay.co.nz). The inclusion of Proud to Play in Auckland’s Pride Festival prompted us to consider the intersections of queer feelings, sport and urban activisms. Many cities – in the Minority World – have long been key to the creation of gender and sexual subcultures (Hubbard, 2012). Pride parades and festivals have become expected rituals. Cities – in a quest to show openness to difference and grow economies – encourage lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, plus (LGBTIQ+) people to party and play but not protest (Oswin, 2015). While urban queer scholars have focused on geographies of pride/shame (Bell and Binnie, 2004; Johnston, 2005, 2007; Johnston and Waitt, 2015; Waitt, 2003; Waitt and Stapel, 2011) many have yet to consider the ways in which sporting Pride events create and agitate messy constructions of cities, homonormativities and queer feelings.

In this article we conceive Proud to Play as a socio-spatial force, an affectual economy, in which ‘emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities – or bodily space with social space – through the very intensity of their attachments’ (Ahmed, 2004: 120). We therefore seek to understand urban activisms by addressing the affectual economy of this Auckland urban sporting Pride event. It is in spaces comprised by urban Pride sports events where normative notions of gender, sexuality and ethnicity are reproduced, challenged and felt. This approach shows how participants of Proud to Play in Auckland oscillate within an affective economy between play/protest, happy/sad and pride/shame.

Gender and sexuality activisms in urban sporting events have received critical attention from geographers of gender and sexualities (Hubbard and Wilkinson, 2015) as well as sociologists of sport and leisure (Caudwell, 2006, 2018; Davidson, 2013; Kaufman and Wolff, 2010; Lamond and Spracklen, 2014; Sykes, 2016). Urban researchers – such as Gorman-Murray and Nash (2016), Lewis (2016) and Mattson (2015) – offer nuanced insights into urban landscapes, queerly creative and neoliberal cities. Probyn (2000, 2003, 2005), Munt (2007) and Kaufman and Woolf (2010) have led us to argue that there is great potentiality in thinking about bodies, sport, cities, pride and shame (Johnston, 2007; Waitt and Clifton, 2015). We bring these literatures together and extend them by asking ‘what does happiness do’ (Ahmed, 2010: 2) to cities, activisms and queer sporting bodies in the context of Proud to Play? Adopting Ahmed’s (2010) ‘unhappy queer’ concept allows us to critically consider not just happiness, but also the negative, shameful and difficult feelings that circulate in and through bodies and places during urban Pride events. At Pride events activism is ‘imagined as converting unhappy queers into happy ones’ (Ahmed, 2010: 108). We are concerned with how the aspiration to happiness – within the polities of Proud to Play – cultivates and challenges gendered, sexualised and racialised cities, bodily norms and behaviours.

In what follows, first, we turn to literature on Pride, cities and queer sport. Second,
emotion, affect and specifically Ahmed’s (2010) ‘unhappy queer’ are discussed to tease out the pride/shame, happy/sad and play/protest dynamics of bodies and cities. Here we extend urban studies by drawing connections between queer urban scholarship, sport, emotions and gay pride activisms. In the third section we introduce Proud to Play New Zealand followed by an explanation of methods. We then focus on three participants’ experiences to advance an argument that sporting bodies inhabit and conform to happy normative assumptions of neoliberal progress as well as trouble gender, sexuality and whiteness at Proud to Play. The portraits highlight: the way in which homonormativity adds to the pursuit of happiness and youthful masculine athleticism; precarious happiness and oppositional lesbian desire; and, a rejection of whiteness in the pursuit of Māori happiness. The article shows how Proud to Play creates negotiated urban spaces of transformation, power and difference.

**Troubled urban spaces of gender, sexualities, activism and sport**

Pride events, as Browne (2007) puts it, are ‘parties with politics’. The question that queer, cultural, feminist and urban scholars ask is: whose politics and how political are they? (Davidson and McDonald, 2018). While Pride events have a longstanding historical basis of troubling homophobic and transphobic discourses, scepticism now exists about the gains that can be made through LGBTIQ+ activism because of corporate sponsors and state authority involvement (Duggan, 2003; Johnston, 2005). Oswin (2015: 558) argues, ‘sexual difference is increasingly marshalled as a symbol of progress and modernity for the purposes of fostering national and urban competitiveness in various contexts’. This is an era of new homonormativity where politics, rather than contesting dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, ‘upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay constituency and a privatised, depoliticised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption’ (Duggan, 2003: 50).

Gorman-Murray and Nash (2016) tease out complicated urban power dynamics in their discussion of the City of Toronto’s winning bid to host 2014 World Pride. Focusing on consumption, commensality and sociability in relation to World Pride, Gorman-Murray and Nash (2016) illustrate the ways in which Toronto’s (gay) Village and other neighbourhoods are reimagined as queer. Further, Brown (2012: 1067) notes, ‘queer critiques of homonormativity are frequently and problematically at odds with the lives and aspirations of many lesbians and gay men’.

Sociologist sports scholars are rethinking the advancement of human rights and Pride events (Caudwell, 2018; Davidson and McDonald, 2018; Sykes, 2016) as well as acknowledging critical studies of leisure and sporting events as simultaneously political and a space of activism. Whether queer sport activism mobilises a new form of homonormative modernism and nationalism in the Minority World or not, is a central concern of these scholars (see also Davidson, 2013; King, 2008; Lewis, 2016; McDonald, 2008). Encouraging people to ‘be happy, play sport’ does not address the cause of unhappiness, inequalities and marginalisation (Johnston, 2013; Pringle, 2015). When addressing the relationship between activism and sport, Kaufman and Wolff (2010) assert that the two can be mutually constitutive. They chart experiences of 21 US activist athletes, noting four dimensions: social consciousness; meritocracy; responsible citizenship; and interdependence.

In this sport and politics conundrum, increasing attention is drawn to the affective and emotional dimensions of urban activism to better understand what mobilises and sustains political acts (Hynes and Sharpe, 2009). Bodily registers of Pride events offer
insights into how the circulation of emotion and affects mobilises ideas about justice, (in)equalities, identities and collectives (de Jong, 2016; Johnston, 2016; Johnston and Waitt, 2015). No longer can urban activists be conceived as reducible to specific groups or individuals consciously contesting an idea. Instead, when attention turns to bodies and their differential capacities to be affected and to affect, political subjectivity is always an outcome of a socio-material arrangement. Co-present bodies, things and ideas are integral to not only understanding gendered and sexed subjectivities as fluid and non-binary, but as affective and effective in queer urban activism (Brown, 2007).

For these reasons we provide a new lens to think through emotionally embodied sporting activism at Pride events. We turn to Ahmed (2007, 2008, 2010) to understand better the politics of happiness. She reinterprets the notion of happiness:

> Happiness involves reciprocal forms of aspiration … and also forms of coercion that are exercised and concealed by the very language of reciprocity, such that one person’s happiness is made conditional not only on another person’s happiness but on that person’s willingness to be made happy by the same things. (Ahmed, 2010: 91)

Through the ‘unhappy queer’ figure, Ahmed (2010) suggests that the promise of happiness – and the search for a good life – directs bodies towards certain objects and places. While heterosexual happiness is over-represented in most places, queer bodies require activism to create a narrative of progress, from negative to positive feelings and from exclusion to inclusion. The ‘queer who is happily queer still encounters the world that is unhappy with queer love, but refuses to be made unhappy by that encounter … to be happily queer can be to recognize the unhappiness that is concealed by the promotion of happy normativity’ (Ahmed, 2010: 117).

These concepts can be applied to urban Pride events as ‘queer un/happiness’ asserts the affective dimensions of shameful and proud emotions. Further, these feelings are configured by the intersection of gender, sex, sexualities, race and class. For example, white bodies happily maintain structural advantage and are naturalised in place (Bonnett, 2000; Faria and Mollett, 2016; Frankenberg, 1993; Kobayashi and Peake, 1994, 2000). The queer intersections of sexuality, post-coloniality, indigeneity, race and racism are evident in Aotearoa (Gorman-Murray et al., 2010; Johnston, 2018a). Being happily and queerly proud ‘down under’ ‘means there is a political imperative to acknowledge the confluence of gender, sex, race and indigeneity in our postcolonial nations’ (Johnston, 2018a). The complex politics of play, protest and pride in Auckland follows the next section on methods used to collect empirical material.

**Methods**

Our research design began by securing the support of the Proud to Play and Pride Auckland Festival organisations. We attended Proud to Play as part of a team of ten researchers: seven were human geography students enrolled in a qualitative methods paper at Wollongong University and Gordon was their lecturer; and one research assistant – Phoebe Balle – and Lynda were from the University of Waikato. We stayed in Auckland for the week of Proud to Play events, talking with participants, watching, and entered events as competitors, before surveying and joining the parade on the last day.

Following the lead of Crang (2005), we argue that life narratives not only provide an entry point to participants’ sets of ideas that stabilise understanding of sporting bodies, but also convey what sporting emotions and affects do through how a story is told,
including tone, rhythm of speech, bodily gestures and textual imagery. Thus, our semi-structured interview schedule was designed to help participants narrate the role of sport in their lives: (1) getting to know you; (2) sporty past; (3) sporty you; (4) sport things; and (5) sporty body. Life narratives are helpful in addressing our research aims, not in terms of their faithfulness to fact but of how individuals make sense of their life through retelling sport stories. Each interview was combined with a period of participant sensing.

Participants were recruited on-site at swimming pools, beaches, dance floors, roller rinks, side-lines of a rugby field and ten-pin bowling alleys. We were nimble researchers, attracting participants either before or after they competed in an event. In total, 63 interviews were completed with competitors and spectators and much of these interviews was accredited to the students’ assessment criteria; 51 out of the 63 participants identified as ‘white’ (in various ways, for example, Pākehā, European NZ, NZ/Aussie, Australian, Caucasian, White). Thirty-seven identified as gay male (in three ways: ‘gay male’; ‘gay poofter male’; and ‘homosexual male’). Twenty-four identified as lesbian (in various was, for example, ‘dyke’, ‘gay female’, ‘queer female’ and so on). One identified as bi female and another as hetero female. The focus of this article, however, is on three participants, who were selected using sensory analysis and reflective appraisals of all interviews and through dialogues within the research team. In selecting three ‘portraits’, attention was paid to multi-sensory and embodied politics of identities and how queer sport in the city prompted certain gendered, sexualised and racialised feelings, emotions, gestures and bodily affects. As such, the three ‘portraits’ are not intended to draw generalisations but to allow us to think through un/happy queer feelings, emotions, affect and activism.

These portraits allow us to, first, remain committed to a feminist and queer research agenda and not de-personalise emotions and affect while remaining sensitive to the contradictions of individual experiences. Second, we build upon a strand of social movement literature that underscores the importance of personal accounts to better understand the work of emotions in mobilising people (Brown and Pickerill, 2009). Finally, taking our lead from Pink’s (2015) sensory analysis and using our bodies as instruments of research, allows us to convey the depth of experiences that are illustrative of how the emotional and affectual politics of Pride events work at a personal level towards and against un/happy queer subjectivities. Indeed, the three portraits are used to facilitate rethinking urban activism in and through the body (Gorman-Murray, 2006, 2007; Moss, 1997; Skelton and Valentine, 2005). Each portrait exemplifies urban activisms from our sensory analysis which problematise bodies and spaces. In the next section we argue that during Proud to Play, Auckland performed as ‘happy queer city’, encouraging participants to mingle sporting pleasure with consumerism while concealing inequalities and oppressions.

**Un/happy urban queer playgrounds**

Proud to Play is grassroots and community driven and I wholeheartedly support this initiative as a Rainbow specific sports event. It is also a fantastic opportunity to bring the community together which is always affirming and positive. (Wall, 2016, participant observation notes)

In February 2016, the largest city in Aotearoa New Zealand – Auckland, with a population of 1.4 million (Auckland Council, 2012) – hosted the inaugural Proud to Play Games, a week-long multi-sports event open
to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) athletes and participants in the Australasian region. Louisa Wall (who, before being elected as a Member of Parliament for the Labour Party, was an internationally recognised rugby and netball player) conveys how Proud to Play had prominent status in Aotearoa, with the support of queer politicians. The format included opening and closing ceremonies, badminton, ocean swim, road running, tennis, touch-rugby, dance, ten-pin bowling, roller derby, ocean and pool swimming. Previous gay sporting events in the region were hosted by the Gay Games in Sydney and the Asia Pacific Out Games, in cities such as Wellington (New Zealand), Melbourne and Darwin (Australia).

In the early 2000s, Altman (2001) argued that the international gay games movement had become one of the largest gay and lesbian institutions. Proud to Play 2016 was the first Aotearoa New Zealand event of its kind organised by a charity trust and was held alongside the Auckland Pride Festival where businesses and city government institutions worked hand-in-hand to help pitch the city as ‘gay-friendly’. The majority of participants said that the Auckland festival was important in terms of enhancing visibility of gender and sexuality diversity and inclusion. In response to the question: ‘What does Auckland Pride do for you?’ participants shared personal reflections about the event that revealed a multiplicity of meanings. Four dominant key themes emerged: ‘sustaining a sense of belonging to community/Auckland’; ‘enhancing a sense of pride in oneself’; ‘inspiring pleasure’; and ‘strengthening social bonds’. These four themes suggest a shared understanding of Pride as a key moment in both generating pleasure and sustaining individual, collective and happy queers. The party atmosphere of Auckland Pride remains an important event that for many attendees generates the possibilities to be oneself. As one respondent told, Auckland Pride enabled them to ‘celebrate who I am and who my friends are’.

Yet, during the week of Pride there was a sense that this celebration is spatially and temporarily distinct with a constant reminder that this ‘happiness will be precarious and dangerous’ (Ahmed, 2010: 109). Proud to Play was held at a time when increasing attention was being drawn to the magnitude of homophobia and transphobia in sports in both Aotearoa and elsewhere. An international study on homophobia in sport reported that 78% of LGBTIQ+ people have experienced discrimination in Aotearoa New Zealand sports (see www.outinthefields.com). In May 2016 some of Aotearoa’s sporting organisations came together committed to encourage greater diversity and inclusion across sport, and the ‘for everyone’ campaign was launched (www.sportforeveryone.co.nz). Feelings of happiness and unhappiness are mutually constituted in Auckland during Proud to Play. The promise of happiness means that the city takes on a particular form and image of the future.

As in other global cities – such as Sydney, San Francisco, Cape Town, Tel Aviv, for example – Auckland businesses, city council and LGBTIQ+ communities and social movements join forces to market the city as gay-friendly (Bell and Binnie, 2004). The notion that economically competitive cities tolerate (and encourage) gender and sexual diversity is now taken for granted (Hubbard et al., 2017). In this discourse, gender and sexual difference is marshalled as a symbol of social progress and modernity to foster urban competitiveness (Rushbrook, 2002). Although Proud to Play was dubbed as a progressive movement, the event also reproduced and reflected uneven gendered, sexed, raced and sexualised urban power relations. We learnt while conducting Proud to Play research that there was no opportunity to
come out as unhappy queers and question why Auckland was hosting the event. This is part of what Ahmed (2010) might call a ‘moral order’ within urban spaces that silence dissent in the pursuits of a ‘good’ capitalist city.

Auckland, with nearly 40% of its 1.4 million residents born overseas, has more than 180 ethnic communities (Auckland Council, 2012; Statistics New Zealand, 2013). The ways in which people learn to live with difference in this diverse settler colonial city is shaped by the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, belonging and othering. Despite its being a superdiverse city (Spoonley, 2014), privileged (usually white) urban residents can minimise or avoid encounters with racialised difference (Higgins, 2019). Yet, these same residents will prioritise attendance at Auckland’s Pride events which are led by, and incorporate, tikanga Māori (Māori cultural practices) as well as different Pacific group participation. Auckland is a city where there is a complex interplay of urban Pride indigenous and postcolonial politics. For example, in 2015 and 2016 Auckland Pride Parades were sites of protest against Aotearoa New Zealand’s treatment of transgender and Māori prisoners. For many, the Auckland Pride Parade is complicit in the ongoing colonisation and gender conformity of Aotearoa (see Johnston, 2018b). The requirement to be happy, however, is pervasive, in which the justification of happiness plays a vital role intertwining colonial and commercial interests.

Ahmed (2010: 124) notes: ‘For happiness to become a mission the colonized other must first be deemed unhappy.’ Proud to Play was opened with a pōwhiri (a process where Māori of that particular region welcome visitors). This cultural encounter is significant in that it acknowledges manuhiri (visitors), accepts them and removes any tapu (or restrictions) of the manuhiri so they may be connected with tangata whenua (hosts). The opening and closing ceremonies were the only time during the week-long event when tikanga and te reo Māori (Māori language) were used. As we illustrate later, a participant reflects on the marginalisation of Māori in the city’s queer sporting events.

We now turn to three portraits. The first describes the bodily dynamics of happiness and unhappiness, pride and shame within a confined understanding of men and masculinity. George’s narrative speaks to notions of homonormativity (Duggan, 2003; McDonald, 2008). Competition and bodily perfection allow a younger athletic masculinity to emerge through the dynamics of un/happiness, pride and shame while swimming or running. The possibilities of urban activism are embedded in neoliberal contours. In contrast, the second showcases Kate’s precarious experiences of pride/shame and un/happiness and brings to the fore how Proud to Play mobilises a queer oppositional culture to her everyday life. The third is centred on Tama. He embodies his Māori ancestry. He arrives at Proud to Play not as a single contestants but deploys participation through Māori communities and legends. This expression of urban activism enables him to challenge the whiteness of the event by connecting with community, place, and by reconstructing traditions of, and for, takatāpui (non-heteronormative and gender diverse Māori). Taken together, these three portraits provide windows into how different Proud to Play sporting bodies and practices rework urban spaces in order to support gender and sexual difference. Through these illustrations, we advance a more nuanced perspective of contested urban activisms.

Homonationalism: Narrowing the making of men and expanding urban spaces

George offers insights to a happiness script where queer bodies are aligned with what is
already acceptable and orients his body towards ‘homonormativity’. After participating with George in the road race, we met again after the medal ceremony in Silo Park, downtown Auckland. His face seemed older than the sculpted tanned body dressed in a branded t-shirt and shorts and he exuded pride. George is a solicitor and lives together with his partner of three years in Melbourne. George grew up in rural Victoria, Australia, and attended a private school where doing sport was taken for granted. In his words, he considers himself a ‘sporty person’, who can ‘talk sports’. Today, he runs and swims regularly. He watches sports ‘all the time’.

Almost every year since the Sydney 2002 Gay Games, George has participated in a Pride sporting event somewhere in the world. For George, the return to Pride sporting events is about the possibilities of happiness through winning. George trains his body for Proud to Play to avoid the unhappy consequences of losing:

I’ve always had that competitive spirit for as long as I can remember. It’s important. You know, I’m not going to come here and compete and come last. What’s the point? And that’s why I try hard.

George offers insights of a participant not willing to risk the consequences of losing. He is happiest at Proud to Play when he wins, and thus aligns his body with the homonormative narrative underpinning urban queer sporting events (Lewis, 2016). His regular return to sporting Pride events is a way to quell a longing for bodily perfection and inclusion that depends on looking young, fit and trim. He says that playing sport is about:

trying to look good and feel good about yourself. I think I might have a body image problem because I want to look good. And at my age, I am looking good, I think, my body. Greying hair but I’ve got abs and I never used to have that. And I only got them in the last two or three years, and that makes me feel good about myself. So, I want to look good. And so, sport is helping me look good. And I want to look good for myself, and for my partner, and other people to say how good I look. But it’s mostly for myself.

Hence, George’s sports training is not only to stay fit, but also involves happiness in that it orients him to look a specific way. Defined abdomen muscles make him feel happy about his body. He explains the imperatives of playing sport by discussing what the bodily affect of happiness does in terms of affirming a sense of self not only in his own eyes but in those of others.

I look in the mirror all the time. I’m looking at my abs, my body … always. But I’m never going to be, as you and I know, we’re not going to be bodybuilders. We’re not going to have the ultimate masculine physique, but I’m happy to have abs. And that makes me feel good, that I can have those.

As Ahmed (2010: 91) argues, ‘Happiness involves reciprocal forms of aspiration.’ George’s narrative points to the emotionally embodied ways that age is felt through sports events, specifically in relation to his partner and other competitors’ bodies. The happiness with which George talks about abs at 40 years of age conveys the social norms in certain versions of gay masculinity that are often attached to younger lean, muscular and hairless bodies (Lewis, 2016).

If the desire for happiness might be experienced through how bodies align to social norms, then shame may be a condition of unhappiness. George provided interesting insight into the ways shame operates as an integral part of preparation and participation in Pride sports events:

When I go to overseas games, I usually put a rinse through my hair, brown it. And so, my overseas Gay Games and Out Games friends, they all think I’m a brunette. And I say I’ve
got grey hair and they don’t believe me. But I didn’t for these because I wasn’t trying hard, so I didn’t put the rinse through my hair and it only lasts for two weeks and then it goes back to normal grey and that’s what also makes me feel and look younger and it makes me feel good about myself. It’s all about that positive image to myself.

For George, putting a rinse through his hair is aligned to how older sporting bodies may not be as happy attending certain events. Probyn (2004) argues that embodied shame foregrounds not only the self, but the limits to the desired attributes of selfhood that are contingent upon the social context. George conveys how grey hair may trigger the intensity of bodily shame in front of other Gay Games and Out Games participants. The conditional qualities of happiness are reliant on sociality, tourism spaces and competitiveness. To avoid shame, George goes on to explain that his happiness requires shaving and detoxing his body in readiness for competition.

When I go to world events, I shave everything except my pubic hair, of course, and my head. But I shave the legs, I shave the arms, armpits, chest. I get a back wax, that sort of thing, and that makes me feel really super confident ... And as I’ve told you, I don’t drink alcohol for six months.

George illustrates the bodily affects of shame that may work against happiness at sporting Pride events in response to the performativity of the self under the surveillance of others. George shaves to feel happy about conforming to desired attributes that align narrow understandings of gay masculinities with sporting masculinities. How George prepares his body for participating is the pull towards a hegemonic version of a sporting masculinity that is hairless and drug free.

George’s happiness is heightened when he dresses in the Australian national colours of green and gold. George explains how wearing green and gold helps strengthen his sense of self at the event:

I like wearing my Australia thing rather than my Frontrunners [club] team. And with my swimming, we have a team-bathers and a team cap, and so we all wear those. So, yeah, I wear the team uniform. But when I run, generally, I always try to color-coordinate myself. Doesn’t always work, but I do. Fashion’s important to how I look. Makes you feel good and if I feel good, I feel confident and that goes with having a tan, which I know is bad for you, but it makes me feel good about myself.

To be happy at Proud to Play, George performs a very narrow version of a desired and desirable gay sporting masculinity. Sporting bodies – George’s and others’ – are constructed not only through institutions and biological imperatives, but also through the affective geographies of happiness and shame that involve non-human actors (sunlight, dyes, razors and clothes) alongside sets of ideas about attractive bodies and nationality. George is part of Proud to Play’s neoliberal sexual politics that operate along the lines of assimilation of ‘the gay individual’ into the city and nation-state through narratives of sport and consumerism. His body – and the narrow sense of masculinity – feels happy in a city that ‘expands’ to accommodate him. Happy, George fits in, and glides through, Auckland’s city Proud to Play spaces.

Competing demands and lesbian desires

Kate’s narrative alludes to the promise of happiness in return for training and competing at Proud to Play. Away from Proud to Play, being out in her everyday world is a source of unhappiness. Kate spoke with us beside the pool as she waited for her turn to compete in swimming. She was dressed in a tight swim costume (bathers), had her swim cap and goggles in hand and a towel thrown
around her shoulders. She was very relaxed and happy to be part of the research and described herself as a ‘female and lesbian’. Kate was ‘born and bred in Sydney’ and is in her late 50s. She has had many jobs but is currently working as a registered nurse doing training and assessment in a small private Christian hospital. Kate’s happiness at work depends on managing her lesbian identity:

Usually when I start working somewhere I don’t, I’m not out because I want people to see me as me and not as the lesbian. After a period of time, I get to know them and they get to know me, and I don’t have a problem being out, umm, and I’ve only just recently started working in, you know, a registered training organization and I’m not out there as yet for those same reasons … But generally, in every other work place I’ve been, I’m eventually out, yeah but like I said, I don’t want to be seen as just the lesbian. (Emphasis in original)

Unhappy at work, Kate expressed the happiness of declaring solidarity with a Sydney based LGBTIQ+ swim club, where she has been a member – swimming several times a week – for about five years. Kate thinks that sport is vital for LGBTIQ+ communities, because: ‘it’s an alternative way of meeting people apart from the bars, apart from drinking and apart from using drugs’. She laughs as she tells us this, then offers ‘and you are generally around really hot bodies, as well, which doesn’t hurt’. Kate expressed that she did not mind what anyone did sexually with each other but at a competition ‘the focus is on swimming’. For Kate, Proud to Play was a welcomed release from the precarious and dangerous structures and maintains ‘a straight world’:

I live in a straight world. I work in a straight world. I want to be able to socialize in a gay and lesbian community and this is why it [Proud to Play] is really important. I can come here and just be me. I’m not going to worry about getting judged because I’m a lesbian, you know, or being thought that I’m weird or perverted or whatever.

Kate lives in Sydney, a city usually understood to be LGBTIQ+ friendly due, in part, to the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras (Waitt, 2006). Yet, the history of Sydney Mardi Gras shows the complexity of the politics of happiness. Robert Reynolds (2013) notes that in the 1970s, a time when homosexuality was illegal in New South Wales, radical activists located the promise of happiness in a politics of visibility and called all to ‘come out of the closet’ as a revolution against heteropatriarchy. During the 1990s and beyond, these queer urban activists were integral to arguments that Mardi Gras had ‘sold out to the market’. Possibilities of happy queer communities were lost to the ‘happy gay subject’ of neoliberalism. Queer acceptance depended on a very narrow market definition of what was deemed acceptable.

For Kate in 2016, to be ‘out and proud’ at work would cause her own unhappiness. Hence, she finds urban queer sports clubs as a way to cope with heteronormative spaces where she is considered ‘weird or perverted’. Kate tells us that she is very competitive and pushing her body is a source of happiness. She has been ranked as one of the National and State top-ten swimmers of all competitors in her age group. It is not just at swimming that she excels but also competitive dancing and strength competitions:

Oh yeah, yeah definitely, umm and I was involved in same-sex dance sport for many years as well and I did do strength comp[etition] because of, because I’m competitive and I just wanted to see how I would perform in a bigger arena basically, but I prefer same-sex events and competitions, definitely.

Kate finds these Proud to Play spaces to be not only ‘comforting’ and to provide opportunities to feel desirable and desire others: ‘I
can be comfortable being a lesbian, you know and I, even just like in the boys, the boys can kiss each other without a problem or without wondering how everyone else is going to react, you know ... it's very open here, with no judgements.' Away from Proud to Play and other queer spaces, Kate is unhappy about showing same-sex affection. Colleagues and clients in her workplaces are, in her experience, judgemental and thus revealing her sexuality risks her feeling unhappy. Proud to Play sporting spaces, therefore, are somewhere she may feel happy to be a lesbian.

Diet is integral to how Kate prepares her body for sport to enable her capacity for happiness:

I've put on weight, so I've wanted to lose [it]. I've actually lost about 14 kilos ... so the first thing you've got to watch [is] your diet. You've got to watch your diet, routinely. Umm, I don't smoke obviously, umm, and I personally don't drink, and as I said, what I do want to do is get back into resistance training ... I swim three or four times a week when I can. I'm looking to start going back and doing resistance training again this year ... So, uh yeah, I want to go back to it to improve my swimming and also to look better. I want to lose a few more kilos. I probably can't get back to where I was ... and you start to age even more when you lose weight (touches her face).

It would be easy to understand Kate’s experiences solely on the ‘twinned problematics of discipline and transgression’ (Probyn, 2000: 13). She disciplines her body to be strong and slim through routine training. At the same time, she transgresses the norms of what gendered bodies ‘should’ do. Yet, feelings of pride/shame, un/happiness, aspects of sexuality, competitive sport and her personal bests (‘PBs’) complicate these visceral dynamics. Sport is, of course, an arena where winning and losing are key elements. When contestants and organisers of Proud to Play marginalise the importance of winning, they usually refer to ‘personal bests’, which redirects the force of competition inwards (Probyn, 2000).

For Kate, the Proud to Play Games in Auckland are just one competition of many. She was motivated to better her swimming times – her PBs – noting: ‘I’ve just beaten my time by about 12 seconds. Yeah, so that’s awesome!’ She reassured us that 12 seconds is ‘a lot. It doesn’t seem like much but it’s a huge amount. I’m just having trouble with my goggles too, so I can probably go even faster.’ The overall narrative of Proud to Play is about creating a happy community through sport. As Kate shows, however, it does this and more by bringing to the fore the unhappiness in her everyday life. The event provides an opportunity for her to enjoy her own body, as well as bodies around her, and where winning and losing may be internalised through ‘personal bests’.

Swimming at Proud to Play is an intervention into Kate’s usual ‘straight’ places. In Auckland, she feels at ease within the queer competition and is comfortable ‘being herself’. Her happiness makes trouble for certain social norms that shape everyday life by showing same-sex affection, openly admiring bodies and finding lovers. At the same time, her desire to be competitive turns her happiness inward to prioritise the conventional sporting disciplines of dieting and training in order to feel the thrill of control and precision needed to win, or at least beat one’s own time. Happiness and unhappiness, pride and shame circulate within Kate’s own body. She pushes herself to beat her pre-set goals and times, producing mixed feelings of euphoria and disappointment. Kate, and other sporting bodies in Proud to Play, are always relational, sensual and at times contradictory, both troubling and confirming to sporting happiness.
Indigenous activism in the city

Tama’s narrative illustrates indigenous activism in Auckland’s Proud to Play event. Tama is the eldest son of two, ‘with a very traditional Māori father’. Māori are indigenous peoples of Aotearoa. Coming out, Tama says, ‘wasn’t at all easy for me and basically I acted it out by working ridiculously hard which is why I succeeded quite well’. Tama talked about growing up with his whānau (wider family) and iwi (tribe and subtribes) and about the collective approach to whānau, or Māori family life. He smiled when he talked about how:

being part of a collective and spirituality is just normal and the connection to land and people is just all really normal.

Tama is from a small rural town and he grew up knowing only three openly non-heterosexual Māori. He remarked that he ‘had no real role models within our community … it was all just unsaid … So, no real stories from our cultural contexts in relation to takatāpui. ‘Tama goes on to explain what he means by ‘takatāpui’:

Essentially having a relationship with another from the same sex, sharing intimacy with another from the same sex. So, it need not be a sexual relationship, it can be a very close friendship and there are precedents for that, for those types of relationships in Māori history where it was the norm, as opposed to the colonising of the Christians and all of a sudden, these new terms in the case of sexuality.

In Aotearoa New Zealand ‘takatāpui’ is a term for Māori who are gender and sexually diverse. The word first appeared in the 1871 *Dictionary of the Māori Language* and means ‘intimate companion of the same sex’ (Williams, 1971: 147). Māori scholar and activist Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1991: 37) saw the political, social and cultural value in the term. She urged: ‘we should reconstruct the tradition, reinterpret the oral history of this land so skillfully manipulated by the crusading heterosexism of the missionary ethic’.

Colonisation fragments, marginalises, oppresses and devalues takatāpui to the point where being Māori and not straight may be considered whakamā (to be shy, shameful or embarrassed). Takatāpui, according to Te Awekotuku (1991), internalised colonial discourses and many felt māmā (pain and hurt) at their perceived ‘lack’ of existence in Te Ao Māori (Māori world view). Tama was made to think that his feelings, desires and identities were not valid and had no ancestral basis.

As a child, sport was a source of unhappiness. Tama ‘hated rugby, hated soccer, hated all the boys’ sports, but had to play them’. He liked netball, volleyball and field hockey, but ‘wasn’t allowed to play them’. Tama’s narrative reveals how gender norms configure certain sports as acceptable and/or unacceptable.

Without hope or the promise of happiness, Tama said that as a young teenager he:

hit drugs and alcohol pretty hard, particularly mainly in the year before I came out. And probably about two years after I came out I hit rock bottom and got into rehab for drugs and alcohol. I’ve been clean and sober for about 12 years now.

Tama’s journey through young adolescence shows how feelings of whakamā (shame) have accompanied him. Probyn (2005) says that shame as an emotion is so deeply felt it can trigger a re-evaluation and redefinition of the self and therefore has productive capacity to facilitate change. These feelings can prompt critical self-reflexivity and reveal possibilities for one’s changing sense of self. Ahmed (2010) shows how gender and race unfold in space and time and how un/happiness is felt, received and addressed. Tama
acknowledges his past, his present, and imagines the im/possibilities of alternative futures.

After Tama left his hometown and moved to Auckland he did play netball and volleyball. Then, later on in life, in his 30s, Tama’s sport gave way to his career pressures and he spent more time in the gym, then changed to yoga. He still goes to the gym but has moved his personal motives from ‘looking hot to wellbeing’. Tama was recently diagnosed with osteoarthritis in his right hip, and it was suggested by medical professionals that he take up swimming. He, by chance, turned up at the pool when members of Auckland’s gay and lesbian swim group TAMS (Team Auckland Masters Swimmers, http://www.tams.org.nz) were training. Tama remembered seeing them: ‘so I joined them and started coming along. I came just as much to connect with the queer community and swimming … It is what I need to do to connect with this community.’

Central to Tama’s everyday urban activisms is connecting with community and reconstructing traditions of takatāpui. He is part of the Māori Kapa Haka (a traditional Māori performing art) group that performed at the opening of Auckland Pride Festival. The performance opens up possibilities for indigenous queer happiness. That said, Tama is reflexive about how it might be received by others. Kapa Haka, Tama explains, covers:

all the domains – the mentor, the spiritual, the physical, the wider collective – which most of us view as a collective as opposed to as an individual. Yeah, but what I mean is, let’s not fall into that stereotype that Māori or Indigenous equals spirituality … it’s only one part of how I roll, quite frankly.

Tama spoke with animation about Te Ao Māori, noting the importance of whakapapa (genealogy and ancestors). In short, this means that all things – tangible and intangible – are interconnected: ‘ancestors that I can see now and those who I can’t see, are here and our connection is with this area here’. Tama’s Māori geographies are visceral and it is the land and ancestral stories that guide his actions. His participation in Proud to Play is to encourage other takatāpui to engage in sport. He told us about how his ancestors arrived from the ocean and – as he notes below – that one ancestress, in particular, was gender non-conforming:

I come from Whakatāne which literally means to ‘act as a man’ and Whakatāne comes from the story of Toroa who was the captain of the Mātaatua [one of the voyaging waka/canoes first to land at Whakatāne approximately 700 years ago]. … We descend from the waka, the canoe, that came and bought our people here. When they first arrived here the canoe ended up on the shore, as the stories go. Men got off to check it [the land] out. The tide came in, and the canoe starts going out. So Wairaka, the daughter of the captain, exclaimed ‘oh Whakatāne, let us act as men, we are home’ and the women picked up their paddles – which was traditionally a male role – and took the canoe back to shore, and as a result of that, my marae, which is our traditional meeting place, and our subtribe is named after Wairaka. So, we have an awesome story of gender and a woman exclaiming ‘I will act as man’, and it’s completely accepted and she is where we call our identity from. She is what we trace our lineage to and there are carvings of her on our traditional house, and around town. Stories are told and songs and haka are composed about her.

Tama links his ancestral identity with his takatāpui identity. Tama is happy to participate in Proud to Play in order to disrupt feelings of whakamā about being takatāpui. As Tama notes, many young people carry a burden of self-doubt and whakamā for being takatāpui. Associated with this is a type of guilt about not knowing ‘how to be’ takatāpui. As a young tamariki (child) Tama was not allowed to play netball, even though he loved the sport. It was not
deemed to be a sport for boys and men. Without role models, and not knowing about takatāpui knowledges and experiences, he compared himself to an idealised Māori masculinity, which is often represented as a straight man, ‘competent on the marae, confident in the language, saying profoundly classical things and striking warrior-like poses’ (Ramsden, 1995: 120).

Tama is unhappy that more Māori are not participating in the swimming at Proud to Play, acknowledging strong iwi connections to the Pacific Ocean. His participation illustrates the activism required to inspire other takatāpui to take up swimming, join swimming clubs and compete in Proud to Play:

It’s something I particularly share with rangatahi, our young Māori, and young who are coming up. It’s just one of many examples of ancestor stories, role models who have always been there and who make up who we are. And to carry those through by the way of our stories and our physical representation of them in terms of where we go today and what we do today. It is the basis of which we move, including the sports base … I just finished posting on Facebook we need more Māori in the bloody swim team because we are amazing, because we are awesome swimmers.

Proud to Play provides possibilities for decolonising Western pursuits of happiness by the adoption of an indigenous gendered script. As a joyful advocate for participation in Proud to Play, Tama troubles whiteness and decolonises gender and sexualities in Auckland’s urban spaces.

**Conclusions**

In this article we have advanced research on urban activism through drawing on Ahmed’s (2010) notion of the unhappy queer. Ahmed (2010) broadens understanding of activism as emotionally embodied and offers insights into how neoliberalism and heteronormativities operate to conceal ongoing everyday violence, discrimination and non-recognition. We illustrate this embodied notion of activism through the politics of happiness and unhappiness via mixed qualitative methods with three participants at Proud to Play, held in 2016 in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand.

Proud to Play is founded on principles to advance human rights, create social inclusion, promote health and safety and seek political visibility. The implication of this narrative is that queers can now ‘come out’, be accepted and be happy. Our analysis peels back this political strategy. The three portraits illustrate how activism – when conceived as an embodied process – may reconfigure as well as rupture mainstream norms. For George, participation in Proud to Play is a source of happiness that is attached to acceptable expression of sporting masculinity and gay sexuality. George narrates participation as fulfilling a deep desire to feel like he belongs. Through his training and winning, Auckland becomes a city for him to excel in as part of gay Pride urban politics. Yet, his happiness depends on adopting a narrow yet dominant understanding that aligns being gay with sporting masculinity. George embodies the ideal of the happy queer who is fashioned by neoliberal municipal authorities that align visibility with not only social inclusion but also creativity and economic vibrancy. Like George, Kate trains her body for competitive sport and this is a source of happiness. Moreover, for Kate, the event becomes a queer collective that embodies a promise of acceptance. In the midst of unhappiness in her everyday life, she enjoys proximity to a social form where her body feels sexy, away from ‘straight’ and ‘drug and alcohol’ spaces. Yet, and finally, as Tama reminds us, George’s and Kate’s happiness at Proud to Play relies upon promoting some social forms that exclude other queers. Tama is happy to
participate in Proud to Play. He tells of the significance of sport in addressing whakamā (shame), offering a sense of self and purpose. That said, Tama is unhappy that only a few Māori participate in Proud to Play. Tama brings his gender non-conforming ancestress Wairaka to Auckland’s Proud to Play games. Tama’s narrative about Māori ancestry, the naming of his place and marae Whakatāne (to act like men), and the lived experiences of being takatāpu must be told so that neoliberal politics of pride, whiteness and nationality can be troubled.

Our analysis of un/happy queers at Proud to Play has important implications for advancing scholarship in and beyond urban studies. Taking an embodied geographic approach offers new insights to the relationship between cities, activism, sport, happiness and unhappiness. Ahmed (2010) – like others such as Probyn (2005) – illustrates the potentialities of lingering on, and analysing, embodied shame. We advance urban activism by attending to what it means to ‘affirm unhappiness, or at least not to overlook it’ (Ahmed, 2010: 89). Gay Pride urban activisms are often imagined as converting unhappy queers into happy ones, yet, the three portraits we offer in this article hold this binary in tension.

George teaches us that the intensified happy experiences of Pride events may reproduce neoliberal notions of who is acceptable for participants, partners, lovers and spectators. In doing so, the unhappiness of others may be concealed. Kate points towards intensified moments of happiness at Pride events to reveal the unhappiness of everyday heteronormative spaces and places. Finally, Tama claims his happiness from troubling colonial gender and sexuality norms. Acknowledging the embodied dimensions of activism opens a future research agenda that is alive to the politics of emotion to trouble or reconfigure what counts as happy life and happy cities. We encourage urban scholars to consider the multiple and contradictory ways in which urban activisms create messy constructions of cities, homonormativities and queer feelings.

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