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An online encounter

We met online. It was a late spring afternoon. I had been trawling through social media; attempting to connect with queer collectives planning to attend Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras (SGLMG). Following a few hours of searching I came across Goulburn Valley Pride, colloquially known as GV Pride. Compared to the other queer collectives their social media immediately stood out. GV Pride, I soon discovered, was a queer collective located in Shepparton, a manufacturing service centre in regional Victoria, Australia. Population: no more than 30,000. Yet an active webpage, blog, and Twitter, Instagram and Facebook profiles enabled conversations among members, and a barrage of information detailing the group and their many upcoming events. GV Pride had an online presence contrasting strongly with the online activity (or lack thereof) of many other queer collectives. Something interesting was happening here. I was first taken with GV Pride's planning of a luxury coach trip to SGLMG, but I also became intrigued by their organisation of the region's first Pride festival, *Out in the Open*; a festival designed to celebrate community diversity. Reflecting later, I began to ask myself: what was it about this regional service centre that was producing such a visible presence of diversity and sexual politics? And, given this public visibility, what sorts of activism and politics were being performed? Talking with the group online in the ensuing months led to the organising of a stall for recruitment at the Out in the Open festival in November 2012, and joining in on their luxury coach trip to SGLMG in 2013.

This article tells the story of GV Pride's return bus trip to the SGLMG. I examine the collective's 1,400 kilometres return bus journey from regional Victoria to the SGLMG. Including the lead up to, and the aftermath, of this event. In doing so I explore the role of mobilities, emotions and leisure in generating and sustaining this particular queer collective, and thus work to trouble distinctions between activism and tourism, and activism and regionality. I argue that examining GV Pride, and their return journey, introduces alternative ways of doing queer activism that is dependent, and sustained by, particular spaces and emotions. By design, I begin with a critical reading of mobilities and tourism scholarship. I question the absence of activism in tourism scholarship, and give weight to the consideration of queer tourism mobilities as an avenue in which to understand broader

significances of queer politics and activism. I, thereafter, draw on the notion of affective atmospheres and affective economies to assist conceptualisation of the spaces of travel, and the meanings and roles of return journeys to SGLMG. An examination of the Shepparton context and the method is next introduced, rendering insight and reason for the unique version of queer activism performed by GV Pride. Turning to a discussion of the empirical, I detail the unique version of queer politics GV Pride perform; illustrating the ways this performance is dependent on the work of emotion and specificities of Shepparton. Finally, I consider the role of touristic return journeys, illustrating how leisure, mobilities and emotions are used in generating and sustaining this regional queer collective – a tenet which serves to trouble distinctions between activism and tourism. In bringing this all to a conclusion I will argue that GV Pride’s version of activism both reproduces and questions conventional understandings: the deployment of leisure as an alternative space of activism troubles characterisations of activism as effort and work, yet, at the same time, emotion as hierarchical, constrained and inhibiting works to reproduce dominant renderings of activism as ‘valid’.

The politics of tourism mobilities

Tourism is often conceived as antithesis to activism. Tourism is associated with leisure, relaxation, escape and consumption, while activism is commonly identified with involvement, work, effort and ‘ethical practice’ (Dave, 2011). Divisions between activism and tourism prevail through a perception that the success of the tourism sector is dependent on quiet, solitary environments (Buda *et al*, 2014; Hall *et al*, 2003). While activism in its ‘purest’ form is radical, overt and controversial (Askins, 2009). Yet, such distinctions have been questioned in recent years with research on Pride parades (Browne, 2007; Waitt & Staple 2011), solidarity tourism (Binnie & Klesse, 2011) and danger zones (Buda *et al*, 2014), challenging characterisations of tourism as necessarily apolitical, or depoliticised. These studies challenge apolitical understanding of tourism through exploring the interplay between politics, hedonism and tourism. Binnie and Klesse (2011), by way of example, interviewed participants attending March for Tolerance in Krakow, the city’s annual tolerance and equality march, arguing that the concept of hospitality was crucial in the formation of activist networks related to this event. In fact, activist’s failure to perform recognised hospitality practices rendered disenchantment among attendees. Likewise seeking to challenge distinctions between politics and tourism, Browne (2007) examined the messy (re)constitution of Pride spaces through politics, fun and commercialism. Browne argued that such spaces are best conceived as ‘parties with politics’, where hedonism is central to the political (re)constitution of sexed spaces, bodies and identities.

Further to this, some scholars have sought to question constructions of 'activism' as necessarily radical, energetic, resistant, oppositional, and national or global in focus. Askins (2009), and Horton and Kraftl (2009), call for a revaluing of activism that acknowledges its performance through more local, everyday and implicit practices. This revaluing acknowledges the politics of the personal, that is, the ways 'everyday' activism holds potentials to affect, and be affected, by issues taking place across scales. Building on these concerns, Brown and Pickerill (2009) note the importance in acknowledging the ways activist groups seek spaces temporally removed from more visible activist spaces, to attend to their emotional sustainability. This article seeks to build on these (re)characterisations of activism by exploring intersections of tourism, queer activism and emotion through touristic mobilities. Moreover, to further deconstruct dominant understandings of activism, I also seek to bring into focus the dominance of urban centric activist scholarship; through the telling of GV Pride's activism I not only bring attention to the performance of activism within regional areas, but also the different ways activism is performed in relation to specificities of place.

Granting specific attention to the mobilities of tourism stems from two concerns. First, Pride parade scholarship serves as crucial in rendering understandings of the performances of sexed spaces, bodies and identities within the temporal and spatial confines of events. Less scholarship has, however, held concern with the ways Pride events are fluid and co-evolving with various scopes of social and cultural vectors (for exception see Waitt & Staple, 2011). Following Picard and Robinson's (2006) suggestion to prioritise the ways events are deeply imbricated with the social realities of everyday life, I thus seek to shift focus to the return journey, as one way to gain insight into the broader motivations, emotions and attitudes leading up to and following SGLMG, examining the potential role and meanings touristic mobilities might possess longer term. Second, to date, scholarship that has examined queer mobilities tends to focus on longer term queer migration (Knopp, 2004; Gorman-Murray, 2007; Lewis, 2013). This work has served as imperative for breaking down dichotomous constructions of queer movement as always permanent, one way directional flows from rural areas to urban centres. Moving beyond a focus on *migration*, I attempt to widen and extend understandings of queer movement by exploring the motivations and meanings of touristic mobilities. In doing so, I try to extend queer mobilities research to include more than migration experiences, and increase understanding of the multiple and complex ways mobilities may be incorporated throughout the life course.

While acknowledging the complex understandings in the use of the term 'queer', I follow Gorman-Murray and Waitt's (2009) use of 'queer' as pragmatic shorthand for same-sex attracted individuals who identify with non-heteronormative identities, particularly gay men and lesbians. The term

emerged in the late 1980s from a critique of feminism as being restrictive due to continued prevalence of homophobia. Radically anti-essentialist in its agenda, queer cautions against universal truths and unitary characterisations. I find the term useful as a descriptor in referring to the non-normative identities and politics that form to create GV Pride.

The use of the term queer emerged from a critique of gay and lesbian as being restrictive due to continued prevalence of homophobia (Binnie & Valentine 1999). Geographers using queer theory were driven by a slightly different, yet overlapping, agenda to those geographers researching gay and lesbian identities and space (Knopp 2007). Queer scholars, within geography and beyond, drew on post-modern and post-structuralist theorists, like Butler (1990, 1993, 1997) and Sedgwick (2003), to undo categorical characterisations, reconceiving sexuality as socially and spatially fluid (Lewis 2012a). Radically anti-essentialist in its agenda, queer geographers were cautious of universal truths and unitary characterisations. The introduction of queer theory to geography generated a shift in focus from examination of 'gay space', to exploration of the multiplicity, paradoxes and fluidity of experience (Browne *et al.* 2007; Phillips & Watt 2000).

In examining the spaces of travel, and the meanings of return journeys to SGLMG, I turn to the notion of 'affective atmospheres', as developed by Anderson (2014) (see also Bissell, 2010; McCormack, 2008) and the analogy of 'affective economies' as composed by Ahmed (2004). Affective atmospheres, for Anderson, are necessarily abstract and distributed. Yet they are palpable, registered in and through the sensing body. They are not, however, emergent or belonging to any one particular body. Affective atmospheres are also not reducible to any one discrete emotion. To be sure, they envelope and surround through dynamic processes. Perhaps of greatest importance, affective atmospheres do mediate capacities to affect and be affected. Yet, at the same time, atmospheres are always felt differently; there are thus always possibilities for individuals to act other than the affective atmosphere. In this article I draw on the framework of affective atmospheres to make sense of the ways affects, moods and emotions are not only emergent through unified encounters, they may also be part of complex conditions derived through other pre-existing processes, events and relations. That is, I illustrate how GV Pride is already enveloped by affective atmospheres before undertaking the journey, which have developed through the work of emotional sustainability undertaken by the group. While affective atmospheres are background phenomena, they do affect how GV Pride inhabit travel, as affective atmospheres become entangled with other moods, emotions and materialities in varying ways during the return journey.

Ahmed's (2004) analogy of 'affective economies' is also useful in conceptualising the ways emotions move between and become attached to social, material and psychic bodies. Emotions, for Ahmed,

work in much the same way as capital, 'affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced only as an effect of its circulation' (Ahmed, 2004, p. 120). As with capital, through circulation emotions increase in magnitude. The more emotions circulate the more affective they become. It is through this process of circulation that emotions increasingly appear to 'contain' affect. By way of example, the affective economy of trust as relating to GV Pride does not inhabit any-body but rather circulates between social, material and psychic bodies. Trust has undergone a process of intensification through increasing circulation within GV Pride, which has served to shape particular boundaries and surfaces of the group, and the return journey.

Shepparton, Victoria

Shepparton is located in north east Victoria, approximately 180 kilometres from Melbourne. As noted above, the population of Shepparton is around 30,000, while the population of the entire Goulburn Valley (in which GV Pride aims to service) is over 60,000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2015). It is a major agricultural and manufacturing centre, and is therefore vulnerable to the declining of both industries within the Australian context. In contrast to many other regional centres throughout Victoria (such as Bright, Ballarat, Bendigo and Daylesford) Shepparton has not benefitted from economic diversification into tourism, education or health. Youth unemployment, for instance, rose in Shepparton by 40 % during the 2013/14 financial year (Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), 2014), sitting at 8.3 %, compared with the national 5.1 % (Munro, 2012).

Shepparton has also suffered from understandings that it is unsafe and conservative. A *Community Indicators Victoria* (2012) report detailed in 2011 only 53.5% of Shepparton surveyed residents felt safe walking alone after dark, compared to 70.3% across the state. Suicide rates are also above state average: in 2013, 15.5 per 100,000 for the region compared to 11.01 per 100,000 for Victoria (Whitelaw, 2014). Moreover, a 2011 study on same sex attracted and gender questioning youth suicide prevention in the Greater Shepparton region found mixed perceptions around non-normative sexualities (Hobbs & Hillier, 2011). When asked to explain Shepparton's perceptions to non-normative sexualities one participant responded: 'Pretty conservative. Some sections of [the] younger community are good, very open, lots of experimentation but still a pretty hard core group of homophobic people out there in the adult community, we certainly have same sex attracted people who would not feel comfortable' (Hobbs & Hillier, 2011). Similarly, a local health worker shared 'It is still a fairly narrow minded place with small town values and systems. Predominately still a football, netball, soccer region and have archaic thoughts about relationships and how they should look' (Hobbs & Hillier, 2011). In interpreting the above statistics and narratives, there is a sense Shepparton possesses multiple, conflicting and shifting perceptions around what it means to be a

man or a woman, heterosexual or non-heterosexual. All of which serve to determine the version of queer politics and sexualities GV Pride seeks to perform.

GV Pride aims to create a space for belonging and site of public visibility at the scale of Greater Shepparton; possessing an underlying belief that in this time of changing Australian sexual politics, visibility will normalise difference. The group is inclusive of anyone desiring 'a safe space for friendship, family, networking and fellowship' (Goulburn Valley Pride, 2015). Rather than acting from a space of resistance and opposition to external structures, or investing energy in lobbying law reform, GV Pride works through a focus on the importance of inclusive social events that enhance group collectivity. It is for this reason the group's energy is directed towards community events, such as Out in the Open, and shared return journeys to Pride parades. The group is volunteer run and receives funding from membership and sponsorship.

Method

This article shares the experiences of 18 individuals who undertook a return bus trip from Shepparton to Sydney for the 2013 SGLMG. Participants identified with a range of sexualities, the majority self-identified as queer, lesbian or gay, while two claimed a heterosexual identity. No individuals claimed a transgender, intersex or bisexual identity. They ranged in age from early twenties to mid-sixties. The overwhelming majority worked full-time. Occupations were a mix of service, white collar and blue collar. Previous SGLMG attendance varied; for some this was their first time, while others no longer recalled the number of times they had travelled to SGLMG. Crucially, some members in their twenties, attending for the first time, held limited knowledge of the political history of SGLMG, conceiving the event as opportunity to celebrate diversity, spend time with GV Pride members and party.

'Travel ethnographies' were employed that combined semi-structured interviews (both before and after festival attendance) and observant participation (Brown, 2007). Interviews were favoured because of their conversational, fluid form and ability to explore the complexity and differences of individuals' unique interests and experiences (Bennett, 2004). Follow up interviews were planned to create a time-space where relations between myself and participants could develop at a deeper level, and issues, differences and contradictions thoroughly explored. Observant participation took place as I travelled with participants, and connected with participants through Facebook after returning (de Jong, 2015). Observant participation, rather than participant observation, enabled engagement with the materialities of the return journey. That is, I too became a participant in the journey: eating, chatting, watching movies, sleeping, laughing with others and so on. Encounters and

emotions were recorded as field notes and analysed in parallel with a narrative analysis of transcribed interviews.

Tourism can be a space of classed privilege, where neoliberal processes serve to exclude particular individuals (Puar, 2002). Attending the SGLMG Parade is free, however, many of the events surrounding the parade are highly priced, and travelling to and staying in Sydney during SGLMG can be costly. Further to this, SGLMG itself is often accused of favouring promotional images of fun, young, white, toned, middle class and masculine (Best, 2005); representations which may render some uncomfortable. Interestingly, GV Pride advertised two sponsored packages to members between the ages of 18-30, which sought to cover nearly 50% of the price of travel. To enter, members were required to answer in 300 words 'what would it mean for you to receive a \$250 sponsorship towards your \$550pp Mardi Gras weekend away payment?' This opportunity was advertised at meetings, the Facebook page and in the group's newsletter. While some members between the ages of 18-30 attended the trip, no eligible members applied for the sponsorships. It thus remained unclaimed. Speaking with colleagues while undertaking this research I was consistently asked the extent to which a classed dimension influenced those who travelled. While a classed dimension may have existed, participants themselves did not describe their experiences in terms of class. I, therefore, have not sought to reify class discourses through the analysis and writing process. At the same time, SGLMG attendance and the lack of financial support required suggests participants may be positioned as, or aspired to be considered, middle class. Moreover, it is conceivable, however, that members who did not attend may have been excluded through economic dimensions, or through the anticipated discomfort in accessing certain spaces of SGLMG.

The return journey unfolded as follows: we departed Shepparton around 7:45 am Friday morning; the day before SGLMG Parade. With over 700 kilometres stretching ahead, a number of stops were planned [see Figure 1 for journey route]. First Albury train station, for a coffee and toilet break; next a service centre near Gundagai for lunch, and finally another service centre in Pheasants Nest (the final service centre before suburban Sydney) for another toilet and coffee break, before we met early evening peak hour traffic in the south west suburbs of Sydney. The journey was semi-structured, with mostly unenforced times granted to each stop. Members often remained in large groups during stops. Choosing to share meals together, rather than break off into smaller groups. Upon much anticipation the bus finally arrived in Sydney's eastern suburbs around 7 pm Friday evening, nearly 12 hours after leaving Shepparton. Following three nights in Sydney, the bus returned early morning the next Monday, leaving Sydney around 7:30 am, visiting the same three

stops (yet with less time spent at each), before returning to Shepparton to meet some surprisingly heavy peak hour traffic and the late afternoon sun, around 5:30 pm.

Figure 1 about here. 'Figure 1: Map detailing return journey from Shepparton, Victoria to Sydney, New South Wales.

Source: Google Maps.'

GV Pride: the role and politics of emotional sustainability

Entering the conference room in one of Shepparton's many pubs on the opening night of Out in the Open, I began to put names to faces. As briefly mentioned at the outset of this article, Out in the Open is a Pride awareness festival organised by GV Pride. The festival is held in Shepparton and the year I attended, 2013, marked its first year. The driver behind both Out in the Open and GV Pride, Jack, led the evening's events. In his early thirties, Jack grew up in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, moving to Shepparton in his early twenties when offered a job with Christian non-for-profit organisation, Uniting Care. Recognising a lack of social spaces for gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer and ally identifying individuals, Jack started GV Pride eight years ago.

In conversation with Jack, later that evening, I attempted to understand some of the reasons driving GV Pride to undertake the bus journey to SGLMG:

Anna: Have you ever thought of putting together a GV Pride parade float?

Jack: [hesitates] Yeah, um ... we've long spoken about [pause, pensive] um ... Sydney Mardi Gras is recognized throughout the world, it's a major event in our country and I think it is an event for our country, for Sydney, and so I think there should be more state representation. GV Pride is a social group, it is a Shepparton based group and it's Shepparton focused. So, although GV Pride is the coordinator of this road trip, it's very Shepparton centric and I think that putting Shepparton on the map for the purpose of the float in Mardi Gras is less important.

Jack's narrative illustrates the ways the politics of Pride play out differently across space and scale. While characterisations of SGLMG are multiple, relational and open, the event is broadly popularised for its national and international visibility, flamboyant, overtly sexualised and camp night time celebratory sensibility, and its oppositional, satirical commentary on the politics and laws of the day (Markwell & Waitt, 2009). Contrasting with the work of GV Pride, SGLMG arguably undertakes an

important political role in introducing and managing non-normative sexualities discourses in the Australian narrative – generating immense public visibility at the scale of the nation (Markwell & Waitt, 2009). Jack understands this positioning of SGLMG, and the ways it differs with the priorities of GV Pride. The political work undertaken by GV Pride is conceived as ‘more important’ at the local, Shepparton scale, rather than that of the national (or state) scale in which SGLMG represents. GV Pride turns inwards, working through discourses of care and inclusion. Rather than opportunity to perform a Pride politics aligning with the outward looking and highly visible national representation a float affords, travel to SGLMG is conceived as a Shepparton centric leisure opportunity, enabling stronger relations within the group.

The crucial inward focus on GV Pride and the performances through which the group is sustained became further evident the following morning. Meeting for coffee, Jack introduced me to Jess in a local coffee shop where she works full time. Jess is 23. Born and raised in the Goulburn Valley, Jess moved to Shepparton from a smaller town, 70 kilometres away, following high school. Originally introduced to GV Pride through a friend, she is now actively involved (since fieldwork Jess has become president of GV Pride). Speaking with Jess over coffee she explains how emotions work to render GV Pride membership sustainable:

So I went a few times, and then after going to GV Pride, I tried to be... I would start catching up with a few different people, like out ... as well. So I became really close to Matt and that’s kind of... it just kind of evolved from there...

Jess pauses:

...and I think if it wasn’t for that I would’ve moved because...it wasn’t that I didn’t love my friends or anything...I just didn’t think there was anything else. And now I feel like I have so much more substance in my life...it’s really really changed my perspective a lot. People always say: ‘Oh you just work at a coffee shop’, but for me my job makes me money, there’s the things I volunteer my time for that are really important and what I tell people that I love.

For Jess, the emotion of love sustains her involvement with GV Pride, and prevents her from moving elsewhere. Love toward GV Pride also works as a form of resilience, or immunity from alternative obligations, such as employment. Jess was not alone in characterising the work that love does in sustaining the group; love worked to bring members into place, rendering belonging to GV Pride, and also Shepparton (Morrison *et al.*, 2013). Love was thus crucial to the emotional dimensions of what makes GV Pride (Gould, 2009).

Further explaining the way GV Pride is held together through emotion, Jess moved on to share:

...and for me, it's getting away from my dramatized friends... which can be very draining...because it's all girls, all the time. It can be very intense and, so it was good meeting new people and making new friends. It's just a really good way to meet people, really. Also like you know because Jack and all the people in the committee, they always organize events. And there's always you know a bus or something so it's always easy to get there. And it's always fun, so.

GV Pride utilizes a framework of care that moves beyond the spatial constraints of Shepparton, to spaces of Pride leisure events across New South Wales and Victoria. Organized leisure events generate opportunities for fun. Opportunities that further hold the group together. Jess's narrative speaks to the ways GV Pride commitment is more than shared identity or mutual politics. Members also sought belonging with GV Pride because, simply, it is fun. It offers possibilities to make new friends and generates a form of organized entertainment, and collective travel opportunities not available to Jess through more conventional friendships. This doubling affect is important because it highlights the affective role of joy, and the pleasures of leisure, in rendering belonging, and sustaining the group (Hynes & Sharpe, 2009). For GV Pride, rather than being absent, the use of pleasure and joy perpetuate their politics. Wilkinson (2009) warns, however, that the ruling of certain 'appropriate emotions' (such as joy), within political communities may serve to exclude those desiring to perform alternative types of feelings deemed out of place (such as anger or frustration). Following Wilkinson (2009), inhibiting certain emotions deemed less relevant closes down possibilities for reflection and debate, and thus can actually come to mirror the emotions found in mainstream society.

Differing slightly from Wilkinson's analysis, rather than completely inhibiting more negative emotions, GV Pride utilized a dynamic interplay of emotions, temporally and spatially negotiating the performances of specific emotions as a way to heighten care and belonging within the group. The following narrative, again from Jess, illustrates the ways sorrow was temporally and spatially constrained within the 'private' space of group meetings. A process contrasting with joy, which emerged more freely and frequently across 'public' spaces of travel and festival attendance. Jess shared:

Jack asked Dan [GV Pride member] and myself if we were interested in being leaders at the meetings and I kind of thought about it and I thought it'd be a really good opportunity to see what kind of difference you can make in someone's life. So, yeah, so I love that we're doing that at the meetings. Like Jack still works there as well but it's kind of up to us, what we decide to do at the meetings. It's amazing about teaching life skills and being there so that

they can learn to be independent and learn to accept that you know, being out and being proud isn't necessarily a bad thing. Yeah so... support ... you know, they need a shoulder to cry on, share things. And on the other hand, anybody that just needs, doesn't have any friends and needs somewhere to go like, kind of like a would be church youth group. Yeah, kind of like a network ...we can put them in contact with somebody who can help them further along.

Feminist scholars have long acknowledged the dynamic entanglements of emotions, such as love and hate, pleasure and pain, and pride and shame (Fortier, 2008; Gould, 2009; Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2014; Probyn, 2000b, 2004). The spatial and temporal containment of 'negative' and 'positive' emotions as they unfold through GV Pride performances, emergent through Jess' narrative, points specifically to a dynamic interplay between pride and shame. Following Probyn (2004), shame stems from something that is read to be 'out of place'. In this instance, non-normative sexuality is out of place within Shepparton. While everyday life is often privatised, reading non-normative subjectivities 'as out of place' rips shame into existence. Pride, emergent from the work of GV Pride, works to reconfigure shame as a strategy to trouble normative discourses that produce shame. Shame, is thus felt as the limits of pride. In interpreting Jess's words I suggest sorrow, as revealed through crying, bleeds from shame; sorrow is a further acknowledgment that one does not 'fit in' to heteronormative conceptions of Shepparton. Shame and sorrow therefore represent the boundaries of acceptance within Shepparton, serving as the impetus for GV Pride's existence and unique relational ethics (which does not align with the normative ethics circulating at the scale of Shepparton), as well as the spatial negotiation of joy and sorrow.

The relational ethics performed by GV Pride through their meetings, in part, responds to the broader unevenness of normative care practices across Shepparton. The sorrow, emergent through feeling out of place within Shepparton, generates the imperatives GV Pride places on performances of care (Milligan & Wiles, 2010). Sorrow is a product of those seeking to erase certain identities and experiences. A requirement of Jess's membership as a 'leader' is to extend comfort to those reduced to sorrow. Where to be out of place in Shepparton, is to be in place within GV Pride. Responding to sorrow, pride emerges through the performance of carer. Obligatory to her role as leader. In its sustainability, GV Pride depends on these relational emotional power dynamics for its longevity, where a relational ethics and collective welfare permeates among longer term members, extended to newer members, ultimately heightening group pride, strengthening identity and attempting to eradicate sexualised shame felt through the broader Shepparton community.

Emotions travel and circulate as affective atmospheres through a range of different spatialities. GV Pride, however, attempts to manage love, joy, pride and sorrow in specific, hierarchical ways to sustain emotional well-being over longer temporalities. Sorrow as performed in Jess's narrative, for example, appeared to be confined within the 'private' spaces of organised meetings, and was thus limited in its 'public' appearance. Joy, in contrast, was more readily (re)produced in a range of varying 'public' spaces, and was closely linked to the less direct spaces of activism deployed by the group. For example, the spaces of touristic travel during their return journey to SGLMG.

Outward journey

Arriving just after 7 am, Friday morning it was hard to miss the crowd of members and their mass of rainbow materialities dwelling on the footpath between the parked bus and Uniting Care. In consequence to the group's visibility within Shepparton, a number of local news outlets had featured reports on the journey. The most prominent to date was filming as I arrived. GV Weeknights, a commercial week nightly news program, broadcasting on all things Goulburn Valley. Some members had keenly arrived early to speak to the GV Weeknights reporter, while camera crew took sweeping shots of the group as we boarded the bus. This event layered an excitable buzz over the group, heightening the affective atmosphere of anticipated joy.

Travelling up the Hume Highway heading towards Sydney early Friday morning, dry farmlands stretching to meet distant mountains, while cars screamed past the relative slowness of our bus, the ways this journey was configured for GV Pride members became clearer. Upon entering, the bus had immediately been refashioned to accommodate bodies for a long trip. A material and discursive process that involved film, music, decorations and Facebook. With only 20 bodies [18 participants, the bus driver and myself] on a bus able to accommodate over 50, members spread out, extending their bodies and possessions into the space. Early on, rainbow decorations were hung throughout and Jack led a short introduction. These practices helped to territorialise the bus as inclusive, serving to create an intimacy that transformed the space from a conventional bus to a GV Pride space.

The Facebook page created around the trip was used humorously as members tagged each other in photos and status updates, and shared music and links to various pieces of information. At the beginning of the journey, for instance, one GV Pride member, John, created an online survey, linked to the group's Facebook page, as a way to determine which movies to watch during the trip. After much deliberation three movies were chosen: *Adventures of Priscilla: Queen of the Desert*, *Transamerica* and *Mamma Mia* (the third possessing a somewhat controversial last place). *Priscilla*, voted at number one, was the only uncontroversial choice; oft labelled as Australia's only queer road

musical, it performed as a fitting backdrop to the outward journey. Some of those on the bus playfully linked 'good' and 'bad' movie reviews in the survey's comments section in an attempt to sway other's votes. Asking this question through Facebook, brought everyone on the bus into conversations that took place both on and offline. The *in situ* utilisation of the survey on-the-move is an interesting example of using an online space to become closer with those already physically proximate, rather than how it is often academically understood as a way to bring people together over distance (cf. Schwanen and Kwan, 2008).

Chatting with Jack about the atmosphere during the outward journey over coffee a couple of days after returning to Shepparton, he reflected:

There was just this sense of we're on the bus...we're all here for the same reasons...we all must be feeling the same thing.

Pausing:

So very quickly there was just this sense of common purpose, safety, ease of getting to know people...and not just sitting there in their own bubble fearing things, but actually talking.

The atmospheres during the outward journey contrasted with conventional bus travel. Bull (2005) identified the ways travellers attempt to create privatised bubbles when travelling. Particular social conventions, such as the use of individual mobile technologies, establish a level of autonomy over time and place, rendering an aural privacy when travelling in public space. GV Pride members, conversely, drew on material, discursive and emotional processes (such as Facebook, music, excitement, stops and soft, large seats) to prevent and break down the emergence of privatised bubbles, pulling travellers' together, rather than apart. Social cohesion developed in a similar way to touristic coach journeys – where group bonds often become strengthened through sharing extended time together within the spatial confines of a coach (Tucker, 2005). Yet, contrasting slightly, the social cohesion emergent through the outward journey was generated through affective atmospheres already circulating, as well as the use of management practices during the journey often utilised by touristic coach companies to draw individuals together (Tucker, 2005).

Conversations with those around me revealed more of the motivations for travelling with GV Pride. Deb and Peta, the couple sitting in the seats in front explained that it would have been quicker and cheaper for them to just jump in the car to drive to Sydney. Yet, they preferred the slower, sociability of the bus, and the heightened mindfulness of a collective politics of Pride. Vannini's (2014) understanding of slowness is useful in interpreting these ideas. Vannini shares that slowing down means to affect the way we dwell in the world and in turn be affected by it; slowing down can

be a way of increasing the body's capacity to cultivate affective awareness of the self, others, movement and sense of place. Often conceptualised as negative, slowness was reconfigured by the group as a way to strengthen relations.

This was evident in the following example, where slowness, alongside temporal pauses allowing reconfiguration, long temporalities and the bus's materialities enabled the unfolding of long intimate dialogue between one participant, Leah, and myself. Leah and I had started talking when the bus stopped in Albury for coffee. Leah, in her 40s, moved to Shepparton to become a public servant a couple of years ago after 'living all over the place'. Leah is now GV Pride's Secretary. Previously sitting on opposite ends of the bus, Leah and I had not previously spoken. Following coffee break we had followed each other back onto the bus, continuing our conversation. Sometimes discussion was only between the two of us, at moments others joined in. In the course of this time Leah's narrative comfortably became intimate as she soon began sharing her story and the role of GV Pride into the space of the bus. At the time I felt slightly surprised with Fiona's immediate care for and about those on the bus (including myself). I had not met Fiona before that morning; despite this she shared experiences regarding her life-course and past intimate relationships.

Care through practices of listening and telling personal narratives was not unique to Fiona. Many on the bus were forthcoming with storying intimate experience, using the space of the bus to further learn about each other's life narratives. I suggest the intensity of care, trust and intimacy relied on certain affects that extended beyond these individual encounters. Following Anderson's (2014) notion of 'affective atmospheres', and Ahmed's (2004) analogy of 'affective economies' an affective atmosphere of care already existed in some sense before members entered the spaces of travel. Since the group's inception eight years ago, care had undergone a process of intensification, increasing in circulation through the group's performance of a relational ethics. Through affective atmospheres, a certain type of care, and by extension trust and intimacy, was thus already circulating among members upon entering the space of the bus, yet was also reliant on the other varying affects encountered through the assemblage emergent during travel. Travelling with the group, I too became a body in this affective atmosphere of care, and was consequently affected by it.

It was not, however, predetermined that care would circulate within the bus, and attach itself to all travelling bodies. Rather its emergence was dependent on the ways it came to intercept with the assemblage. The use of food and toilet stops along the way, for example, reassembled GV Pride's formation; rendering new encounters with travelling bodies through different seating arrangements. This reassembling of travelling bodies may not have occurred if the bus had kept the same rhythm,

moving steadily along the Hume Highway. These reassemblages worked to inhibit the formation of clusters and bubbles that may have become established over time. Disruptions, followed by the patterned, repetitious rhythm of the bus enabled a certain type of long, intimate conversation to occur. The journey's length further generated a time and space for slow, considered responses and long pauses.

Intimate conversations, in which practices of care emerged, were also heightened through the material affordances of the bus: tall, padded lounge style seats, sitting side by side, rather than face to face, alongside the hypnotic, uninterrupted dry grasslands. The unique conversation enabled within the space of the bus rendered a reciprocal opportunity to learn more about members. The outward journey was, in consequence, used to further heighten relationships of care, between and for one another. The use of travel in this way aligns with the work of Laurier *et al.* (2008), who found that the motion offered through long journeys, alongside the materialities of the car, to be conducive to the emergence of intimate, uninterrupted conversation. Similarly, Laurier *et al.* (2008) found travel conversations extended relationships of responsibility and care, producing new expectations, obligations and values.

There were moments, however, where embodied connections between bodies broke down. At times, for instance, some members broke into song, or spoke about 'Mardi Gras anthems'ⁱ. These encounters were felt, and thus, responded to differently depending on members' personal histories, knowledges and subjectivities. Those on the bus, including myself, who were not so aware of the aesthetic discoursesⁱⁱ of SGLMG seemed uncomfortable, fidgety or fell silent during such encounters. Conversely, those in the know became increasingly joyous and excitable through this sharing. These moments divided the group. For those ignorant to this insider cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977), feelings of alienation emerged. Others, who recognised and consumed these particular aesthetic SGLMG products, were able to establish a heightened sense of belonging to both other members who recognised and consumed these products and to SGLMG, more broadly. Following Bourdieu (1977), knowledge of particular forms of culture enables social mobility, rendering heightened group status for those individuals. The joy emergent through such encounters was not momentary – often generating further dialogue, sharing and humour – generating contrasting emotions performed by those in the know, and those not. These moments hint at the politics at work within GV Pride, where the joy emergent through this cultural capital served as crucial in rendering heightened group status to some. In consequence, others experienced moments of not belonging. While belonging and not belonging unfolded within the temporal moment of the journey, the crucial role tourist mobilities play in sustaining the group means such moments may affect those who choose to remain member's

longer term. Recognising the politics of such emotional frictions is crucial for understanding the requirements of belonging to GV Pride, the limits of the inclusiveness advocated by the group, and the ability of members to affect atmospheres, rather than merely be affected.

Return journey

In contrast to the outward journey, where aligning oneself with the emotions of joy and pleasure served as crucial to collective belonging; capacities of caring bodies were brought into question during the return journey. For the return journey it was permissible for bodies to act fatigued and less responsive. Permissibility to let go was further enabled through the time spent together during the course of the weekend. Because members had chosen to stay together, or in two or three larger groups, rather than spend time alone or in small groups, there was a shared understanding regarding how intense the weekend had been, as well as an absent necessity to exchange experiences. The return journey, in consequence, was more about working to sustain individual members, rather than working to sustain the collective.

The early morning departure of the return journey was relaxed and undemanding; tired voices were soft, while tired bodies created slow, considered movements around the bus. The material affordances of the bus – tall seats, curtains, arm rests and pillows – were reconceived as enabling small, somewhat private, clandestine bubbles. Films played much softer than they had during the outward journey, rendering a background hum. Starting out from central Sydney there was a sense of collective ambivalence in returning to Shepparton, evident through members' dialogue. Fiona expressed the interplay between relief and disappointment as we left Sydney, in humorously stating: 'It's over now for another year. What do we do? Sleep?' As the bus left the outer suburbs of Sydney, again undertaking the steady and recurrent movement along the Hume, voices slowly dissolved as bodies fell into quiescence (Bissell 2009).

An affective economy of care – already circulating as an affective atmosphere around the bus – had undergone a process of intensification through the extended time spent together since Friday morning. During the return journey care further intensified as it intersected with empathy of a collective tiredness among members – allowing an intimate atmosphere to emerge upon returning home; evident, as Jess shared:

Jess: ...our trip home actually wasn't as bad like, I think ... because I slept for quite a bit and I was quite in an uncomfortable position when I woke up. I ... but um ... I don't know how I had my head on the armrest but ...

Anna: Did you have a sore neck?

Jess: No, I had my pillow and I had my head like on the armrest so my feet were like up on the window.

Anna: Ohhh.

Jess: But I am like a crazy sleeper anyway so ... It was good like, it was great coming home. Like, if we'd stayed, I would have wanted to stay but the second we were on the bus, I was like, I hear my bed.

Jess's narrative identifies the ways GV Pride bodies were able to become vulnerable within the spaces of the bus during the return journey. For Jess the affective economies of care, alongside her own tiredness, enabled the bubble around her seat to feel closer to her bed, and in consequence she was somewhat unaware of the ways her body performed during sleep. There was no need to remain alert to where they were heading and what their body might do during sleep. This affective economy of care contrasts between the bus and more conventional travel. Bissell (2009), for example, tells of the ways travelling commuters prevent falling asleep for the fear their body might do things deemed embarrassing. Moreover, Bissell speaks of the ways sleep must be managed during the railway journey because it is the requirement of passengers to pay attention to the various knowledges: such as departure and arrival times, ticketing, and journey routes.

During much of the return journey members worked to sustain their own bodies, through sleep and quiescence, rather than work on the sustainability of the collective. Yet, members only held the capacity to sustain their own bodies because of the affective economy of care that circulated through the group, which was reliant on the work of GV Pride. That is, an affective economy of care was only able to emerge because of the relational ethics performed through the group leading up to the return journey. What all this means is that while at one level the tired bodies evident during the return journey identified the limits of care felt towards the group – at another level an ability to succumb to the fatigued body may not have been possible had the previous care work not been undertaken by the group.

An intimate awakening occurred as the bus turned off the Hume Highway, undertaking the last leg towards Shepparton along the A300. Turning onto a bumpier, slower country road contrasted with the Hume's hypnotic rhythm and smooth materiality. Sun engulfed the bus as we hit late afternoon. The culmination of these affects awoke those sleeping on the bus. Rustling, slow movements, soft chatter, stretching, intimate, sleepy glances, all slowly increased until the bus became charged with the excitement of the impending arrival of Shepparton. At this point talk turned to the future plans

of the group – the following events being the Think About Itⁱⁱⁱ launch that coming week, and their journey to the Daylesford Chill Out^{iv} festival the following weekend.

Conclusion

This article sought to trouble distinctions between activism and tourism, and activism and regionality. It did this by exploring the role of tourism, mobilities and emotion for a regional Australian queer collective, and their 1,400 kilometre return journey to the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade. Tourism is often conceived as the antithesis of activism; activist and tourism divisions prevail through perceptions that the success of the tourism sector is dependent on quiet, solitary environments, while activism is conversely viewed as necessarily radical, overt and controversial. This paper assisted in challenging this dichotomy through illustrating how GV Pride utilised return journeys to SGLMG to perform their version of inclusive queer activism; as part of a broader negotiation of varying spaces and emotions that assist in sustaining the group. Granting attention to the alternative ways the queer collective utilises tourism as a dimension of activism strengthens characterisations of leisure as always more than a space of hedonism and escape. At the same time, however, the hierarchical and spatially constrained construction of emotions worked to reproduce dominant renderings of activism. Moreover, in sharing the experiences and practices of a regional queer collective this paper challenged the dominance of urban centric activist scholarship. Through presenting GV Pride's journey this paper has thus contributed to emerging scholarship that questions distinct, essentialised and bounded constructions of both activism and tourism.

The broader implications of this study is that festivals and events play a critical, but under-recognised, role longer term, beyond their time-frame. Thus this study further contributes to festival and event scholarship through illustrating the ways Pride events are deeply imbricated with the social realities of everyday life. Drawing on mobilities studies, which attends to the emotional and embodied dimensions of travel, provided a way through which to explore the role of SGLMG beyond its spatial and temporal confines. In doing so, this paper was also able to widen and extend understandings of queer movement, beyond a focus on migration experience. As such, this paper

extends understanding of the multiple and complex ways mobilities are incorporated through the life course.

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Notes:

ⁱ 'Mardi Gras anthems' are songs traditionally played as part of SGLMG. They are generally either enjoyed ironically or were considered revolutionary for their time.

ⁱⁱ I here refer to aesthetic discourses as the music, art and artists strongly tied to SGLMG identity.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Think About It* was an art event launched as part of SheppARTon Festival, the week following Mardi Gras. The project aimed to share the voices and emotions of young regional Victorians who identify with non-normative genders and sexualities to the broader community, in the hope the community would then 'think about it'. This project was significant because it was part of the highly visible SheppARTon festival, an event which aims to 'stimulate dialogue and challenge audiences in accessible public environments' (SheppARTon Festival 2015). In its current form, the project has been recreated as an online installation (Think About It 2015).

^{iv} Chill Out Festival is one of the biggest and longest running queer Pride events in regional Australia. It is held in the regional Victorian town of Daylesford – which is approximately 200 kilometres from Shepparton. Traditionally, the event takes place the weekend following Mardi Gras.

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