Sex and the City: Production and Consumption of the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras

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ABSTRACT

The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is considered to be one of Australia’s “hallmark” consumption events. This paper draws from anthropological literature on carnivalesque festivals, postmodern streams of thought, and original participant observation data in order to construct a new theoretical interpretation of the Mardi Gras. The festival is a contested event with meanings associated with the carnivalesque and gay and lesbian politics, executed with a “frivolous” and satirical approach to serious political issues. Specifically, the carnivalesque is experienced and produced in Mardi Gras events and activities; there is a seemingly frivolous and ironic approach to serious social and political issues and in negotiating “Australian-ness,” and there are multiple perils and pitfalls entailed in marketing an oppositional sensibility in the context of social tolerance of homosexuality and corporate interest in the gay market. Overall, the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras may be considered a “subjunctive” event in that it vividly and imagistically proposes alternative perspectives and hypothetical ways of thinking about the phenomenally experienced world. Findings are discussed in light of postmodern thought that asserts that cultural differences are now ordered, marketed, and consumed for profit.