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# Sydney is not the sum of its gays

May 17 2002

**In spite of recent claims to the contrary, the gay community does not have the monopoly on style, writes Jon Casimir.**

Look, I've met a few of these newfangled gay people in the 15 years I've been in Sydney and I have to say that, on the whole, they've been every bit as dull and uncharismatic as me and most of the other heterosexuals I know.

And yet, I surprise myself by writing that sentence. Aren't all gay men vibrant, stylish, witty bon vivants? God knows, that's what television tells us. That's the PR spin that seems to seep through gay and straight media alike.

Just this week, Andrew Leigh and Justin Wolfers suggested on this page that Sydney's gay community is evidence of our city's hipness, that gays, with their high disposable income and innate stylishness, are the very gauge of a city's desirability.

Now there's an idea laden with assumptions. For a start, which Sydney are we talking about? Does anyone think there's only one city we live in, one lifestyle, one culture? Isn't this "Sydney" merely the self-important, eastern suburbs onanistic enclave (of which I am proudly part)?

Face it, if we turned all the suburbs east of Hyde Park and north of Maroubra into a toxic waste dump, most people in our metropolis would simply read about it in the paper and get on with their lives. A few weeks later, someone might turn to a fellow passenger on a train and say: "Hey, didn't there used to be ..." But that would be it.

Even if you accept the orthodoxy that Sydney's gay community makes a disproportionate contribution to the arts, to fashion, to food, then you're still talking about areas which regularly

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affect the lives of a minority. And if you don't accept it, well, you're a heretic.

But at the risk of that, can I suggest that gay men are not the cultural master race? Would it be OK to think that, just perhaps, certain sections of the gay community ought to get over themselves?

If the Mardi Gras has made anything clear, it's that there are plenty of gay men who aren't buff, can't dance, eat the wrong foods, have no headstart on style whatsoever and are possessed of excruciating musical taste - the list of guest singers at the after-show party has always read like a hit parade of horror (Dannii Minogue, Jimmy Barnes, Human Nature, Bardot ...).

And you know, all of these truths are perfectly fine. The stereotype that gay men are stylish trendsetters may be flattering, but it's still a stereotype, every bit as restrictive and dehumanising as the negative ones. From my armchair, the biggest contribution made by gay Sydney is its ongoing commitment to the fight against stereotype, the fight for understanding, for acceptance of difference.

I love living in a city full of a crazy jumble of people. I'm glad there's a big, out and proud gay and lesbian community here. I wish it were bigger. I wish Sydney were more Asian. I wish it were more African. Lately I've been wishing we were a hell of a lot more Afghan.

I'm glad the postwar migrants, the Italians, Greeks and Lebanese, have given all they have. I'm glad we didn't manage to knock off all the Aborigines. I'm glad for the contributions that people of all stripes and types make to Sydney. But to suggest that some are more valuable than others is to play a game that makes us all a little bit smaller.

**Jon Casimir is a *Herald* journalist.**

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