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# Unhappy is the gay confronted with poofed-up research

May 15 2002

**Sydney may be a vibrant, fun city, but Paul Loftus says he and his mates are sick to death of being held responsible for it.**

So we poofs are yet again responsible for preserving for Sydney the status of Australia's capital of fun and vibrancy.

I read with interest the comment piece by Justin Wolfers and Andrew Leigh in Monday's *Herald*. Their argument, based on research by American academics, suggests that a city's livability relates directly to its population of gay men. The rationale is that gay men, having no children, have buckets of dollars to lavish on themselves and their loved ones.

Gay men have money and an innate sense of style, and therefore where such specimens live must be fabulous. Add something like the outrageous beauty of Sydney and, well, Nancy's your uncle.

There is something disquieting about these reports on gay issues by, I suspect, straight academics.

It is akin to men writing of the physical pain of childbirth. It is concerning not only for the obvious personality politics/cultural appropriation issues but, on a more fundamental level, it assumes that one can knowingly and authoritatively write about another's experience and life.

You can't report from the inside unless you are a member. And going to a dance party is not entree into queer society. The membership rites are much more demanding than that.

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On a more fundamental basis, that this study does not recognise the same spending power (and therefore cultural influence) can be enjoyed by lesbian women, single childless people and infertile straight couples exposes, at the outset, the flawed nature of its hypothesis.

So, please, let's just stop this nonsense.

I'm sick to death of being held responsible for the cultural and aesthetic life of a city. I'm tired of having to pioneer things such as the three-quarter-leg pant; of having to go the hard yards in Birkenstock clogs so that Despina and friends at Rockdale shopping centre can wear them without embarrassment. I'm tired of having to find good restaurants and brunch places just so that a month later I won't be able to get a table because the cafe is packed with Bill and Mary, with Jordan in a stroller.

Flippancy aside, these studies primarily annoy me because they reduce me and my friends to mere economic consumption units. They suggest - and this is Leigh and Wolfers' main crime - that we should not be discriminated against because we make your lives brighter and more fun.

"Next time you see two men holding hands, give them a smile," write our authors. We do not want your acceptance on the sole basis of what our spending and habits bring to your enjoyment of Sydney. We do not march on Mardi Gras just to give the folks from Parramatta a show. We march because, at its core, it is a demand for acceptance and equality. Those men holding hands deserve a smile because they are fellow humans enjoying a natural emotion, love. They don't deserve it because of their support for the ricotta hotcakes at Bill's in Darlinghurst.

At its core, this study represents a view of society totally uninvested in the humanity of its gay citizens; its formula sees nothing to consider other than the social and economic benefit they may present.

Additionally, the measure of the quality of this *ber* fun society fails to consider the systemic and structural discrimination which remains for the people credited with its renaissance.

So, yes, we bring in money. Yes, we create trends. But - and here's the key - you at home can do it too. Odd, I know, but please accept the reality of self actualisation through accessories. Don't make us do all the work and don't tie your approval of our relationships or willingness not to bash us to the fact our festival brings in tens of millions of dollars each March.

In her song *Mississippi Goddamn*, Nina Simone sings of hate against blacks in 1960s America. She sings "you don't have to live next to me / just give me my equality". Times have changed, we have moved on. You have to live next to us and we want our equality.

I don't see, however, why we need buy it with style tips and tourist cash when no other group is held to such ransom.

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**In this column, you are invited to apply your wit to anything that makes your blood boil. Send 800 words, with your contact details, to [sbaldwin@smh.com.au](mailto:sbaldwin@smh.com.au) or GPO Box 506, Sydney 2001. Submissions may be edited and may also be published on the Internet.**

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