

## Speech from Post-Mardi Gras Panel, April 26<sup>th</sup> 2012

Hi – I'm Jane Green I'm a queer sex worker, I know that sort of sounds like I'm at an AA meeting ... but the point of saying that, is both of those things are key parts of my identity, & to me key parts of my sexuality. I believe very strongly that I as an individual have the right to choose how to express my identity & sexuality in a way that speaks to the truth of my personal experience and not reflect the bias or stigma that others may attempt to impose on me or "label" me with. This is often an ongoing struggle, separately in terms of queer rights & sex worker rights, & becoming more complicated when confronting peoples ideas of what it means to be a queer sex worker.

I volunteered to be on the working party for Scarlet Alliance's entry for Mardi Gras for 2012, which is the eighth time I have marched. When I have marched before I have done so at times 'in the closet' as a sex worker, because of the extreme whorephobia in the gay community towards sex workers in the past. I would like to stand here today and say that has changed. But in a year when sex workers had to fight tooth and nail to still march in Mardi Gras I really can't say that. I really wish I could.

The reason I mentioned the right to personal identity before is because when I was on the phone with the parade office and they were questioning me over the EOI (Expression of Interest) – that's really what they were questioning.

When it was implied to me that all sex workers must be straight ...

When I was asked – Do you have 'letters' (ie – LGBTQ or I)?

When it was assumed most sex workers must be female ("you're mostly L's, right?")

When I was being made to justify the inclusion of LGBTQI sex workers in Mardi Gras what was really happening was a form of sexual identity credentialism, policing the boundaries of Mardi Gras via the mechanism of homo-normative bureaucracy.

And this phenomenon stems from the idea that to achieve certain agendas – political or otherwise – the gay community has to sanitise its image. That there are groups with interests & philosophies too outside the gay mainstream, that (it's assumed) basically freak out straight society enough that it would hold back the goals of gay community if they were kept onboard – so lets just toss them under the bus for the sake of everyone else. It's not like it's a new phenomenon – sex workers have been thrown under the bus before - & there are always going to be 101 other causes the gay community will fight for before joining to fight for sex workers rights (it's possible the whales may be saved first, which pisses me off, not that I technically have anything against the whales). What makes it especially offensive is that in terms of Mardi Gras the motivation behind the "bus toss" is not just tied up in homo-normativity & whorephobia but that when you dig deeper the whole business is just that – a business. Mardi Gras has become so focused on commercialism.

The entire time we were jumping through hoops trying to get the float approved, I kept thinking “I bet the ANZ float isn’t having this issue” and also “I bet they’re actually saying bugger all for LGBTQI issues” because that whole distinction in the applications process between “being LGBTQI” and “saying something for LGBTQI” is really just a way of dividing the herd between those who are part of gay community and those who want to use gay community as an advertising opportunity going up Oxford Street once a year. And Mardi Gras is quite happy with that, because Mardi Gras is a business.

The only & final authority on the expression of identity & sexual identity should be the individual concerned. When any outside authority gets involved oppression is inevitable – because you’re talking about the imposition of sexual identity from outside the self. And there’s really not many things more confronting than being told by an institution of your own community that “you’re not gay enough” to participate. Or have it implied that you’re not gay at all. Because of your job. And I must admit the thought has occurred to me that if I was a plumber this probably wouldn’t be an issue.

Mardi Gras is threatened by groups that have a presence that could cause political friction or negative media attention because that might affect the bottom line. The fact that these groups are part of gay community and always have been doesn’t factor into it. The fact that Mardi Gras is operating in an environment of homo-normativity, whorephobia, & using the policing of identity to protect its corporate brand & image from it’s own community – should factor into it - & Mardi Gras needs to be answerable to that.

Sex workers have been marching in Mardi Gras since 1978 – we are part of the history of Mardi Gras. We haven’t forgotten that & we won’t allow that to be forgotten or erased. In a year when sex workers were marching in Mardi Gras to highlight the fact that we are fighting for EVERYTHING we have here in NSW - because without decriminalisation our rights will be non-existent – we needed Mardi Gras’ support more than ever. Instead of support – we received interrogation & potential exclusion. These are the sort of politics of exclusion that leave the sex worker community wondering why we bother to march at all.