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Attend the Blue Ridge Gay Pride Festival in
Asheville, North Carolina**

by

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Introduction

This study will seek to discover the motivations that lead to travel to attend the Blue Ridge Gay Pride Festival in Asheville, North Carolina. Understanding what makes this festival in Asheville a desirable event to travel to will help expand the motivation literature, which currently does not account for how sexuality may influence motivations. The findings will also provide insight for tourism providers on how to reach the gay and lesbian market.

Guaracino (2011) provides us with a brief explanation of the terms gay and lesbian that states lesbians and gay men are sexually and affectionally attracted to the same sex as themselves. Gay is also often used as an umbrella term describing gay men and lesbians. Although generally regarded as the LGBT community, this study will focus on the travel experiences of gay men and lesbians. When self-categorizing sexual orientation in quantitative surveys, the proportion of respondents that identify as bisexual is invariably low for measurement purposes. It should also be noted that transgender is not synonymous with sexual orientation, but rather gender identity, so this research will not focus on those individuals either.

Review of Literature

Although general tourist motivations have been studied in depth, there is a lack of information relating to the motivations within the gay community to travel and attend events. Research has shown that tourism as consumption of space is often viewed from a heterosexual viewpoint and that most public and semi-public space is predominantly heteronormative, which is defined as a worldview that promotes straight, or heterosexuality, as the normal or preferred sexual orientation (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Pritchard et al, 2000). Therefore general travel motivation research may not apply to homosexuals or “gay events’ (Pritchard et al, 2000).

Gay consumers are deemed to be of special interest for the tourism industry because research shows that this population has; (1) Higher levels of education, (2) higher average income, (3) fewer children and, (4) higher discretionary income (Guaracino, 2011). In a recent shift, destinations and attractions have set out to market directly to this community due to this positive economic impact it may have (Guaracino, 2007). Tourism has increasingly become involved in the production and consumption of gay and lesbian tourist destinations, both domestically and internationally. Events have begun to assist in the creation of “gay identities” of many cities, which has been a key role in the production of “global gay-friendly destinations” (Markwell, 2002).

As Hughes (2006) mentions, studying homosexuality and how it relates to tourism practices would assist in filling in gaps in literature including the complete lack of attention given to the multiple aspects of subjectivity of embodiment. These gaps exist because there is a normative hetero-masculine presumption of this field of knowledge and filling these gaps would contribute to an awareness of diversity, by creating a new lens to look at

tourism through other than they typical default heterosexual, white, middle-class male tourist (Waite, Markwell, & Gorman-Murray, 2008).

In order to address some of the aforementioned gaps, this study investigated what motivates gay individuals to travel to attend the Blue Ridge Gay Pride Festival, in Asheville, North Carolina.

Study Questions

1. What motivates people to travel to attend Blue Ridge Gay Pride in Asheville, North Carolina?

Hypothesis 1A: Motivations of travelers to attend the event will differ from motivations of locals to attend the event.

Hypothesis 1B: Motivations of gay individuals to attend the event will differ from motivations of straight individuals to attend the event.

Hypothesis 1C: Motivations of gay travelers to the event will differ from motivations of gay locals to attend the event.

Hypothesis 2: The distance a gay visitor traveled to attend the event will cause the strength of motivation for opportunity to experience gay culture, social experiences, excitement, event novelty, escape and family togetherness to significantly differ.

Hypothesis 3: The length of a gay visitors trip to Asheville will cause the strength of motivations for opportunity to experience gay culture, social experiences, excitement, event novelty, escape and family togetherness to significantly differ.

Methods

Asheville, North Carolina was selected as a focus of this study because of its status not only as a popular tourist destination, but also a popular gay friendly area. Often referred to as the "San Francisco of the South," those who live in the area as well as those who just visit know this area as a safe place for the gay community (PR Newswire, 2013). Within the state of North Carolina, it is the smallest, and most rural of the five cities that offer domestic partnership benefits and lists "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" as protected classes (Frankel, 2013). However, unlike major metropolitans such as New York, or San Francisco, the city has not tried to use any advertising efforts to appeal to the gay community in. Therefore, decisions to visit Asheville are free of advertising influences.

The Blue Ridge Gay Pride Festival has grown significantly over the past seven years. Although there are no attendance records from 2007 or 2008, there were just 2,000 attendees in 2009, and 12,000 attendees in 2013. It is important for producers of events to understand why people are choosing to attend their event in order to cater to the population as well as to be able to justify the need for the event. Little is understood about what motivates people to travel to attend the Blue Ridge Gay Pride Festival. Due to the lack of sufficient studies on LGBT tourism motivation, this study reviewed and borrowed foundations from Woo's (2010) motivation between different festival products study, as

well as Clift & Forest (1998) gay men travel motivation study. This study looked at six different motivational dimensions taken from these two studies in order to add to the current body of literature on event tourism motivations and provide valuable information for event and travel providers.

The instrument for this study was developed through adaptation and combination of the motivation scale from Woo's (2012) study and Clift & Forest's (1999) gay travel motivation scale. The survey instrument will address six different motivation dimensions, which are socialization, excitement, event novelty, escape, and family togetherness, and gay culture. The instrument was comprised of four sections: (1) Motivation Dimensions, and (2) Satisfaction of Blue Ridge Gay Pride Experience; (3) Demographics such as gender, sexual orientation, age, household income, and number in party; (4) Trip Identifiers such as purpose, distance from home, time staying, trip experience, and expectations for future visit.

Data for this study was collected at the 2013 Blue Ridge Pride Festival on October 5, 2013 in Asheville, North Carolina. Using systematic sampling, questionnaires were distributed throughout the festival held at Pack Square, for participants to complete themselves. The main researcher and one assistant were posted at the Pride Information, Merchandise & Volunteer booth, while two assistants were at the entrance to the Main Stage area, and two at the entrance to the Youth Pride section. The survey was given to festival attendees 18 years of age and older. In order to track and calculate response rate, each team member kept tallies of the number of people who refused the survey, as well as those who were asked multiple times to be a part of the study. By the end of the day, 315 completed surveys were collected, however due to incomplete responses, 315 were useable.

The results of the data collected were analyzed with SPSS version 21.0. Frequency testing and factor analysis was conducted to gain a holistic view of the sample and motivation variables. In order to address the hypotheses, ANOVA and t-Tests were used.

Expected Outcomes

The purpose of the research is to understand the impact of destination and psychological motives on festival attendance at the Blue Ridge Gay Pride Festival in Asheville, North Carolina.

Based on the literature, we expect the following to be supported by the findings of this study: (1) Motivations for gay individuals and visitors to attend the event will differ significantly in all motivation dimensions from straight individuals and locals.

This research will provide information about what motivates people to travel to attend Blue Ridge Gay Pride in Asheville, North Carolina, and ultimately fill in gaps within the motivation literature.

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