

# Tongue in Cheek: The Theme's the Thing

The queer Pride season is upon us, and the question being asked in each city is, "What's YOUR Pride theme?"

Come again? When did Pride celebrations and parades all start coming out with a "theme"? Did we all watch too much *Queer Eye* and decide that like all good parties, a Pride celebration has to have a theme? This phenomenon completely slid under my radar screen. And yet, there they are.

High school English for me was back in the age of the dinosaurs, but I vaguely recall (as we read our stone tablets) that the "theme" was the message that the writer in question was trying to get across. In other words, the theme encapsulates the message. So is that the purpose of the Pride themes?

I suppose in the early years of Pride, we didn't used to have themes – because the theme

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I did a quick Google search of pride themes in cities around the country and in Europe to learn more. As line after line popped up on my computer screen, I was stunned at how evocative the themes are. How about Boston: "Pride in Progress...What's Your Fight?" Or Los Angeles: "How Do You Wear Your Pride?" where the idea is to ask whether you are out and proud by putting a picture of your partner on your desk

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of Pride was understood: survival and acceptance. Basically, every Pride march – before they evolved into the wonderful festivals and weekend celebrations we have now in many cities and towns – had the theme of "We're here, we're queer, get used to it!" Those were the heady, scary, exhilarating old days. Before we had gay marriage in Massachusetts and civil union in Vermont. And, on the down side, before we had Christian conservatives taking over statehouses and the White House.

These days, everyone basically knows that we're here, we're queer, and we're not going away. So now themes add the political message to parades that have become in many cases more celebrations of who we are (true pride) than demands for recognition and the right to live as the people we are. In other words, now the theme's the thing.

Farther afield, little Leicester, England has a groovy 1960's theme: "Summer of Love – Peace, Passion, and Partnerships." Which immediately presents two things straight folks like to NOT imagine about us: hot blooded passion between members of the same sex AND the commitment of same sex couples. Way to go, Leicester!

The most boring Pride theme I found is from our neighbors to the North. Toronto's theme this year is the not-too-rousing "25 Years and Counting." Whoo-hoo! Yawn. But then, they're Canadian, so what can you really expect? They're not exactly known for flair – at least, not the non-French ones.

After I looked at actual themes, I did an informal survey of what other folks might want to see as Pride themes. One person suggested "Gay Rights = Family Rights." Another offered the hard-to-fit-on-a-poster "Proud to Be Your Queer Brothers, Sisters, Neighbors." Yet another, not too seriously perhaps, suggested the slightly more tactile "Women Lovin' Women Is Finger-Lickin' Good" and the more Village People-esque "Proudly Honoring Our Gay Men In Uniform." I liked – but Disney would not – a theme that you couldn't get out of your head: "It's a Small (Gay) World, After All." A Democrat friend liked "Lesbians Never Tire of Licking Bush." Another liked "Gay Bashing Is a Weapon of Mass Distraction." Or there was my favorite: "Mess With Us and We'll Dress You Funny."

It's probably a good thing that we think about Pride themes now. It means we've come a long way, baby. Because, thematically speaking, we now can say "Gay Marriage Rocks," and we're "Proud to Be... LGBT." ▼

Columnist Kevin Isom is the author of *It Only Hurts When I Polka and Tongue in Cheek and Other Places*, available at bookstores and online. He may be reached at [isomonline@aol.com](mailto:isomonline@aol.com) or [KevinIsom.com](http://KevinIsom.com).

Even Paris, France, one of the most apolitical groups of queer folks you'll ever find, has a really strong theme this year: "Couples, Parenthood, Equality Now!" Mon dieu!

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