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It's a shame that Gina Nickl's commentary on Pride Week (Pride Week fun, but not effective, June 11, 2008) misses the larger impact of Pride Week and the history of gay pride celebrations.

A quick narrative reveals that the first national pride celebration was the Christopher Street Gay Liberation Day March, held exactly a year after the New York City Stonewall Riots in June, 1969. Before the riots police would routinely harass patrons of bars that gays, lesbians and transsexuals frequented. Fed up of the routine and unsubstantiated harassment, patrons finally fought back against police forces in an event that lasted several days. Stonewall is the very reason we celebrate Pride, a crucial and defining moment in gay rights history that has helped lead the way to greater rights and acceptance of the GLBT community we know today.

Aside from the floats, booths, and themes that may to some appear only to flaunt sexual orientation, the main point of Gay Pride is to openly, and without shame, signify the progress that has been made and continues to be made within the gay community and American society.

Nickl's article does little to exhibit the positive effects that Pride celebrations can enable within a community. Her viewpoint argues that Pride does little more than flaunt sexual orientation and that some, both within and outside of the gay community, do not like the way in which the gay community present their collective selves. A supporting quote states that many just get drunk or hook up, and Nickl suggests that "blending in" would be a more appropriate way to

gain equal rights. While these points are arguably valid, they greatly diminish the defining meaning of Pride within the gay community.

Equal rights does not equate fitting a desired mold, and the suggested solution of “blending in” is little more than a poor excuse to allay anyone’s discomfort with a lifestyle different from their own.

For most, Pride is simply not about drinking and hooking up any more than July 4th is about fireworks, Christmas about presents, or Pioneer Day about barbecuing. Small minds and the media may fixate on the outliers, a few rowdy and even crude festival attendees. But the reality is that there are as many different personalities within the gay community as there are in any population segment.

Let’s not get hung up only on rainbow tube-tops and “ass-less chaps,” because there is so much more beyond that. There are those in the gay community today who were the poster children during Stonewall, and haven’t forgotten the reprehensible way homosexuals were treated in our society. A significant portion of Gen-Xers remember the controversial and largely gay Act-Up demonstrators in the late 1980s, and a president who never publicly uttered the word homosexual in two full terms. There are those who sit on edge while courts continue the debate whether gay-straight alliances have any validity in extracurricular school activities, and whose collective chests tighten each time talk of the oft-threatened Federal Marriage Amendment is revived in Congressional hearings.

Some haven’t found the courage to come out and may never do so. There are those who show up to Pride with family members and children, and some who are committed partners (not

to mention higher tax-bracket paying citizens) but do not receive any benefits or legal recognition of their union. Some stay home, and that's fine too.

And of course there are some that have seek attention through questionable fashion, or who like to drink and hook up. Most do not seek out any attention other than the quiet support of showing up for the parade and showing the world who they are.

In spite of the attention Nickl commits to hookups, ass-less chaps and tube-tops, it is much because of these celebrations that society gets a better picture of what the greater gay community looks like. The suggestion of a repeated March on Washington is indeed a great idea, and there should of course be an effort to repeat those demonstrations. While demonstrating the progress of same sex marriage developments in California--certainly a momentous occasion in our immediate history--the point sorely missed is that the California decision, much like the Massachusetts decision, was driven by state laws, not federal, which by and large have not been addressed since the high court's 1967 decision in *Loving v. Virginia*. A march on Washington will do little to achieve equal (not special) marriage rights that have thus far been left by our federal government to be decided within individual states.

Thus, it is largely local equal rights groups and Pride festivals that do much to attract the attention of increasingly tolerant and gay friendly community members and politicians, setting the stage for change on at least that level. Declaring Pride celebrations as ineffective quite carelessly writes off the significant impact Pride actually has on local communities. Utah's Pride parade is evidence enough of positive impacts, as it is now the second largest and most attended parade in Utah.

Certainly things are much easier for gays and lesbians as a whole in today's society, which may be as much a problem for general complacency as it is a benefit. Two states now allow full marriage benefits to same-sex couples, and a handful more recognize same-sex unions. The U.S. Supreme Court, while stopping short of defining marriage, struck down antiquated state sodomy laws as unconstitutional in the 2003 case *Lawrence v. Texas*. Progress has been made, but it is an ongoing process certainly not definable by one or two high profile Washington events.

To be sure, some individuals do have a knack for attracting negative publicity for shenanigans at Pride festivals. But lest we forget, it is a celebration largely of sexual orientation, not a Mitt Romney fundraiser. It may be a valid perception that Pride is about hooking up, that some have questionable fashion quirks, and that Utah is a conservative state. But it is reality that a state which chose eight years ago to disallow same-sex marriages is, as I write this, giving legal marriage recognition to a lesbian couple partnered for 55 years.

Progress can and does happen--if it happens to occur with bare buttocks, so be it. That said, if the only discernible detail recalled about pride is the sight of those bare buttocks, it's time to take another look.

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