

Speakers Notes: “Are Pride festivals still protests?”



The Evolution of Pride in Canada

Intro slide: The Evolution of Pride in Canada

Slide 1- 2SLGBTQIA+

Two-Spirit

Lesbian

Gay

Bisexual

Transgender

Queer or Questioning

Intersex: describes people who are born with physical sex characteristics that don't fit typical medical definitions of exclusively male or female. This may involve variations.

Asexual: describes a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others.

The "+" represents other unique gender and sexual identities.

Purposes of my session will refer to Queer Community

Slide 2- What's in a flag?

Harvey Milk, one of the first openly gay elected officials in the U.S., directly commissioned the creation of the first gay pride flag in **1978**. He urged his close friend, artist and activist Gilbert Baker, to design a positive, unifying symbol for the Queer community.

Baker designed a flag initially featuring **eight horizontal stripes** rather than the six-stripe version widely recognized today

Following the assassination of Harvey Milk in November 1978, demand for the flag surged dramatically. To fulfill this demand through mass commercial production, the design had to be simplified to 6 colors.

(Symbols have always been important)

Following Milk's historic election to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, he wanted to boost the morale of the gay community and give young gay people a sense of hope. He turned to Baker, who had been designing banners and props for various protests. Baker envisioned a flag as the ultimate symbol of visibility and hand-dyed the first rainbow flags, which debuted at the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day parade on June 25, 1978.

Slide 3- Progress Pride Flag

Created in 2018 by activist Daniel Quasar and inspired by the rainbow flag, the new design celebrates the diversity of the Queer communities and calls for a more inclusive society. This flag incorporates chevrons featuring five new colours

Light Blue, Pink, and White: These stripes directly incorporate the colours of the Transgender Pride Flag to center trans and gender-diverse individuals

Black and brown were added to represent Black, Indigenous, and people of colour.

The chevron pattern forms an arrow pointing to the right to indicate forward movement, showing that progress still needs to be made

The Black Stripe (Dual Meaning): It also honors individuals living with HIV/AIDS, those who have been lost to the virus, and the surrounding stigma

Intersex-Inclusive Circle: The two colours and the circle avoid referencing gender stereotypes, unlike the colours pink and blue.

Interesting Fact:

Internationally recognized symbol on par with the recycling symbol. Both symbols share a powerful trait: they belong to the public domain, meaning they carry no corporate copyright and can be freely used by anyone worldwide.

Slide 4- Lost ...not forgotten

For decades, the original banners flown in 1978 were thought to be completely lost. Thirty volunteers had helped Baker hand-dye and stitch the first two flags.

A long-lost, 10-foot by 28-foot fragment of the original 1978 rainbow pride flag, was rediscovered among Baker's belongings in 2020. The surviving section was donated to the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco

Slide 5– Stonewall (1969)

The modern Pride movement is traced back to the Stonewall Uprising in New York City in June 1969. Following years of police harassment and discrimination against Queer people, patrons of the Stonewall Inn resisted a police raid, sparking several days of protests. Although Stonewall occurred in the United States, its impact was felt around the world, including in Canada. It became a symbol of resistance and inspired QUEER communities to organize and advocate for equal rights. Pride began as a protest movement seeking safety, dignity, and justice.

Slide 6 – Canadian Decriminalization (1969)

In the same year as Stonewall, Canada took an important legal step by decriminalizing private consensual sexual activity between adults. These reforms were introduced under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's government.

Trudeau famously stated that there was "no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation." While this was a significant advancement, it did not eliminate discrimination or stigma. Queer Canadians continued to face barriers in employment, housing, healthcare, and public life.

Slide 7 – We Demand (1971)

In August 1971, Queer activists from across Canada gathered in Ottawa for a demonstration known as "We Demand." Activists presented a list of demands to the federal government, calling for equal rights and protections under the law.

The demonstration is considered one of Canada's first large-scale public Queer rights actions. At a time when many participants risked losing their jobs, housing, or family relationships by being publicly identified, their courage helped lay the foundation for future advocacy and social change.

Slide 8 – Early Pride Events

During the 1970s, early Pride events began appearing in Canadian cities including Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. These gatherings were often modest community picnics, marches, educational events, and political demonstrations. Attendance was much smaller than today's Pride celebrations, but these events provided important opportunities for queer people to connect, organize, and build visibility. **Vancouver held the country's first unofficial Pride parade in 1978, later securing an official municipal permit for its 1981 parade?**

Slide 9 – Bathhouse Raids (1981)

In February 1981, Toronto police conducted coordinated raids on several bathhouses (**Operation Soap**), arresting hundreds of men. The raids were widely viewed as discriminatory and sparked immediate protests involving thousands of people. Many historians consider this event to be Canada's equivalent of Stonewall because it mobilized the Queer community and strengthened political organizing. The protests that followed helped build a stronger movement for equality and human rights across the country.

Slide 10 – HIV/AIDS Activism and Community Response

The HIV/AIDS epidemic had a profound impact on Queer communities throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Many people experienced loss, fear, stigma, and discrimination. Community organizations, activists, healthcare providers, and people living with HIV stepped forward to provide support, education, advocacy, and care when government responses were often slow.

Across Canada, grassroots organizations developed innovative approaches to prevention, treatment advocacy, peer support, and harm reduction. This period demonstrated the resilience and strength of Queer communities and remains an important part of Pride history.

Slide 11 – Marriage Equality (2005)

In 2005, Canada became one of the first countries in the world to legalize same-sex marriage nationwide through the Civil Marriage Act. This legislation provided equal marriage rights and legal recognition for same-sex couples across the country. Marriage equality represented an important milestone in the pursuit of legal equality. At the same time, many advocates emphasized that broader issues such as health equity, poverty, racism, and transgender rights also required attention.

Slide 12 –Trans Inclusion

Transgender and gender-diverse people were central to the early “Queer” rights movement and the fight against discrimination.

Today, Pride increasingly recognizes and celebrates the diversity of Queer communities.. Pride has also become more inclusive of trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse communities, highlighting ongoing advocacy for healthcare access, legal protections, safety, and social inclusion.

Slide 13 – Two-Spirit Recognition **use slide text**

Two Spirit: Coined at a 1990 intertribal gathering in Winnipeg, Manitoba, the term serves as a modern umbrella word. (It translates the Anishinaabemowin phrase *niizh manidoowag*, meaning a person who carries both masculine and feminine spirits)

The term Two-Spirit is used by some Indigenous people to describe identities that encompass gender, sexuality, culture, and spirituality within Indigenous traditions. It is important to recognize that Two-Spirit identities are distinct from Western Queer identities and reflect unique Indigenous histories and teachings.

Slide 14 – Pride Today and Future Directions

Pride events today attract millions of participants worldwide and include parades, festivals, educational programs, and advocacy initiatives. While Pride celebrates significant progress, it also continues to address ongoing challenges such as discrimination, accessibility, racial justice, Indigenous reconciliation, housing insecurity, and health inequities... the core fight for cultural safety and liberation remains.

Pride in Canada is spread out over several months, different regions and organizations hold their own official events at varying times. **June – September is considered the Pride Season.**

Pride festivals are still protests. While they look like joyous parties, they serve a dual purpose. They remain vital political demonstrations advocating for Queer rights, safety, and equality, particularly in the face of ongoing discrimination and new legislative rollbacks targeting trans and queer people.

The concept of **"joy as resistance"** recognizes that existing openly, celebrating, and thriving together is a revolutionary act of defiance in a world where Queer rights are frequently challenged

Joy as resistance is not a new concept. Queer Black women have been the thought leaders of this conversation for *years*. Audre Lorde

it's about the idea that embracing our own pleasure whether that's dancing, creativity, community, or any other kind of joy is an act of resistance in a society that asks us to repress the full expression of ourselves.

Pride remains both a celebration and a call to action. Looking ahead, the future of Pride will depend on continued efforts to create inclusive communities where everyone can live openly, safely, and authentically.

The decision to embrace a months-long season rather than a singular week or month comes down to local history, weather constraints, and scheduling. Major cities across Canada hold their own highly recognized, municipal-sanctioned Pride weeks and weekends at different times.

Toronto: Celebrates throughout June, culminating in the massive Pride Toronto festival weekend at the end of the month.

Vancouver: Typically hosts its official Vancouver Pride Festival in late **July and early August**.

Montreal: Holds its large-scale *Fierté Montréal* events in **mid-August**.

Calgary: Hosts its primary Pride week later in the season, running into **early September**

However, modern Pride is also a response to challenges. Organizers continue to advocate for safety amidst rising insurance and security costs.

The movement in Canada focuses on intersectionality. It amplifies the voices of:

- **Two-Spirit** individuals
- Transgender and non-binary youth
- Racialized queer Canadians

Ultimately, today's Pride balances joyful expression with the continued fight for equal rights and systemic inclusion.

Yes, Pride festivals are still protests. While they look like joyous parties, they serve a dual purpose. They remain vital political demonstrations advocating for Queer rights, safety, and equality, particularly in the face of ongoing discrimination and new legislative rollbacks targeting trans and queer people.

Pride festivals are absolutely still protests. While events have grown to include massive, colorful celebrations, the core fight for liberation remains.

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[Positive Leadership Development Institute](#). (Professional Development Leadership Trainings for PWLHIV)

The upcoming PLDI training dates are:

Communications In person (Vancouver): Nov 6-8, 2026 (prerequisite Core Training)

Online Core training: Jan 28- Feb 11, 2027

Governance Training: March 11-25, 2027 (prerequisite Core Training)

In person Core Training: (back at Loon Lake) June 21-24, 2027
