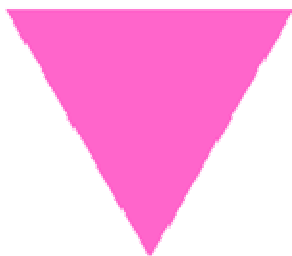


Common Symbols Associated with the LGBTQA Community



Pink Triangle

The pink triangle is easily one of the more popular and widely used and recognized symbols for the gay community. The pink triangle symbol is rooted in World War II times, and reminds us of the atrocities of that era. Although homosexuals were only one of the many groups targeted for extermination by the Nazi regime, it is unfortunately the group that history often excludes. The pink triangle challenges that notion, and defies anyone to deny history.

The history of the pink triangle begins before WWII, during Adolf Hitler's rise to power. Paragraph 175, a clause in German law prohibiting homosexual relations, was revised by Hitler in 1935 to include same-sex fantasies, kissing, embracing, and gay sexual acts. Convicted offenders -- an estimated 25,000 just from 1937 to 1939 -- were sent to prison and then later to concentration camps. They were punished by sterilization, most often accomplished by castration. Then, in 1942 Hitler's punishment for homosexuality was murder.

Each prisoner in the concentration camps wore a colored inverted triangle to designate his/her reason for incarceration. This designation also served to establish a sort of social hierarchy among the prisoners. A green triangle marked its wearer as a regular criminal; a red triangle denoted a political prisoner. Two yellow triangles overlapping to form a Star of David designated a Jewish prisoner. The pink triangle was for homosexuals. A yellow Star of David under a superimposed pink triangle marked the lowest of all prisoners -- a gay Jew.

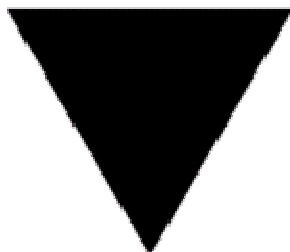
Stories from the camps explain that homosexual prisoners were given the worst tasks and labors. The guards and even other inmates often attacked pink triangle prisoners.

Although homosexual prisoners reportedly were not shipped en masse to the death camps at Auschwitz, a great number of gay men were among the non-Jews who were killed there. Estimates of the number of gay men

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killed during the Nazi regime range from 50,000 to twice that figure. When the war was finally over, countless homosexuals remained prisoners in the camps, because Paragraph 175 remained law in West Germany until its repeal in 1969.

In the 1970s, gay liberation groups resurrected the pink triangle as a popular symbol for the gay rights movement. Not only is the symbol easily recognized, it also draws attention to the historical and current oppression and persecution of homosexuals. In the 1980s, ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) began using the pink triangle as part of their activism. They inverted the symbol, making it point up, to signify an active fight back rather than a passive resignation to fate. Today, for many the pink triangle represents pride, solidarity, and a promise to never allow another occurrence of the Holocaust.



Black Triangle

Like the pink triangle, the black triangle is also a symbol rooted in Nazi Germany. Although lesbians were not included in the Paragraph 175 prohibition of homosexuality, there is evidence to indicate that the black triangle was used to designate prisoners with anti-social behavior. Considering that the Nazi expectation of womanhood was strongly rooted in patriarchy (women were required to center their lives on mothering, housework, and commitments to their church), black triangle prisoners may have included lesbians, prostitutes, women who refused to bear children, and women with other "anti-social" traits. As the pink triangle is historically a male symbol, some lesbians and feminists have similarly reclaimed the black triangle as a symbol of pride and solidarity among women.



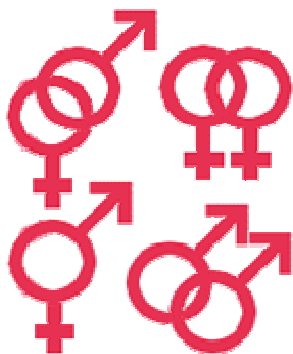
Bisexual Pride Flag

The first Bi Pride Flag was unveiled on Dec 5, 1998. The intent and purpose of the flag is to maximize bisexual pride and visibility.

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The pink color represents sexual attraction to the same sex only (gay and lesbian), the blue represents sexual attraction to the opposite sex only (straight) and the resultant overlap color purple represents sexual attraction to both sexes (bi). The key to understanding the symbolism in the Bi Pride Flag is to know that the purple pixels of color blend unnoticeably into both the pink and blue, just as in the 'real world' where most bi people blend unnoticeably into both the gay/lesbian and straight communities.

There is no question that bi people have helped foster the gay and lesbian movement we have witnessed since the Stonewall riots of 1969. One problem for bisexuals remains their invisibility. This was also a problem for gays and lesbians prior to 1969 as very few were willing to "come out".



Gender Symbols

Gender Symbols are common astrological signs handed down from ancient Roman times. The pointed Mars symbol represents the male and the Venus symbol with the cross represents the female. Since the 1970s, gays have used double interlocking male symbols to represent gay men. Double interlocking female symbols are often used to symbolize lesbianism, but some feminists have instead used the double female symbols to represent sisterhood among women and three interlocking female symbols to denote lesbianism. In the 1970's, some lesbian feminists used three interlocking female symbols to represent their rejection of male standards of monogamy.

Also in the 1970s, gay liberation movements used the male and female symbols superimposed to represent the common goals of lesbians and gay men. These days, the superimposed symbols might also denote a heterosexual aware of the differences and diversity between men and women. A transgendered person might superimpose the male and female symbols in such a way that the arrow

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and cross join on the same single ring.



Mercury (Transgender) Symbol

The astrological sign of Mercury is traditionally the symbol of transgendered peoples. In Greek mythology, Hermes (the Greek version of the Roman god Mercury) and Aphrodite (the goddess of love) had a child named Hermaphroditus. That child possessed both male and female sexual organs, hence the term hermaphrodite. Also, rituals associated with the worship of Aphrodite are believed to have been highly sexual, involving castration, transvestism, and homosexual relations.

In the symbol itself, the crescent moon at the top is supposed to represent the masculine, and the cross at the bottom represents the feminine. The ring represents the individual, with the male and the female balanced at either side.



AIDS Awareness Ribbon

The AIDS Awareness Ribbon, or red ribbon, is commonly worn on jacket lapels and other articles of clothing as a symbol of solidarity and commitment to fight against AIDS.

The Ribbon Project was conceived in 1991 by Visual AIDS, a New York-based charity group of art professionals that aims to recognize and honor friends and colleagues who have died or are dying of AIDS. Visual AIDS encourages arts organizations, museums, commercial galleries, and AIDS support groups to commemorate those lost to AIDS, to create greater awareness of AIDS/HIV transmission, to publicize the needs of Persons With AIDS, and to call for greater funding of services and research. The color red was chosen for its "connection to blood and the idea of passion— not only anger, but love, like a valentine," as stated by Frank Moore of Visual AIDS.

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Worn by host Jeremy Irons, the ribbon made its public debut at the 1991 Tony Award. Red ribbons soon became popular symbols to be worn by celebrities at special functions, especially awards ceremonies. Eventually, some activists worried that the ribbon had become popular to the point that it was being worn as a politically correct fashion statement, therefore only paying lip service to AIDS causes. For example, the U.S. First Lady Barbara Bush wore a red ribbon while sitting in the audience with her husband, but when she stood at the President's side during his speech, her ribbon was conspicuously missing.

Nonetheless, the Ribbon Project remains a powerful force to spread awareness about AIDS and to advocate for further action and research. The sincerest hope for the Ribbon Project is that it will one day no longer be needed because AIDS has been cured.



Breast Cancer Awareness Ribbon

The pink ribbon of Breast Cancer Awareness was inspired by the success of the red AIDS Awareness ribbon. Breast cancer is especially a danger for women, and it's been found that breast cancer is more prevalent in women who do not bear children. Thus, the lesbian community is especially interested in breast cancer awareness and prevention.

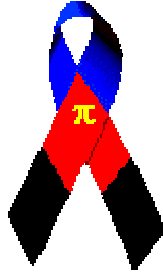


Gay-Teen Suicide Awareness Ribbon

This ribbon, used mainly online, was created by Xavier Neptus, a personal survivor of attempted teen suicide himself. He was inspired to create this campaign after hearing Jason Bolton, a young man who was thrown out of a suburban Detroit high school for being gay, speak about gay youth suicide at the 1997 Lansing, Michigan Pride March. According to Neptus, the color white was chosen to represent clarity of thought and innocence of

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youth. By spreading the word about this campaign and recommending professional resources, Neptus hopes to save other young people from suicide.



Polyamory Awareness & Acceptance Ribbon

This ribbon is based on a flag created by Jim Evans in support of polyamory. Polyamory is the practice of being romantically involved with more than one person at a time. It does not mean promiscuousness or swinging, but rather a loving, honest, trusting relationship between more than two people.

The colors of the ribbon and flag have specific meaning. The color blue represents "the openness and honesty among all partners with which we conduct our multiple relationships"; red represents love and passion (much like the red AIDS Awareness ribbon does); and black represents the solidarity between the partners when they must hide their unaccepted relationship from the eyes of popular society. The symbol in the center is the Greek lower case letter pi, which stands for polyamory.



Lambda

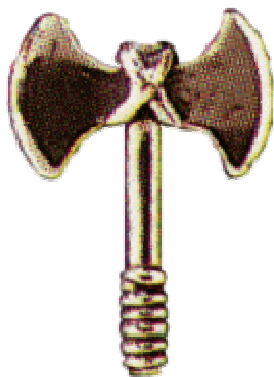
The lambda was first chosen as a gay symbol when it was adopted in 1970 by the New York Gay Activists Alliance. It became the symbol of their growing movement of gay liberation. In 1974, the International Gay Rights Congress held in Edinburgh, Scotland adopted the lambda. As their symbol for lesbian and gay rights, the lambda became popular internationally.

No one seems to have a definitive answer about why the lambda was originally chosen as a gay symbol. Some suggest that it is simply the Greek lower-case letter "l" for liberation. Others disagree, citing the use of lambda in physics to denote energy (the energy we have when we work in concert) or wavelength (are gays and lesbians on a different wavelength?). Lambda may also denote the synergy of the gay movement, the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The lambda also may represent scales and balance, and the constant force that

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keeps opposing sides from overcoming each other -- the hook at the bottom of the right leg signifies the action needed to reach and maintain balance. The ancient Greek Spartans understood the lambda to mean unity, while the Romans considered it "the light of knowledge shed into the darkness of ignorance." Reportedly, Ancient Greeks placed the lambda on shields of Spartan warriors, who were often paired off with younger men in battle. The theory was that warriors would fight more fiercely knowing that their lovers were both watching and fighting alongside them.

Whatever the exact meaning and origin, the lambda historically was understood as a fairly militant symbol whereas today, the symbol is used to represent lesbians' and gay men's shared concerns.



Labrys

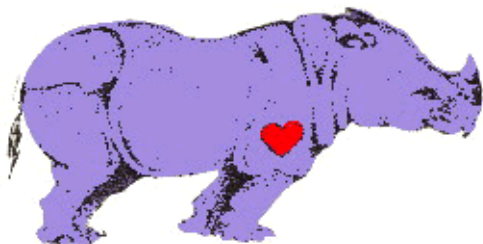
The labrys is a double-sided hatchet or axe commonly used in ancient European, African, and Asian matriarchal societies as both a weapon and a harvesting tool. Greek artwork depicts the Amazon armies of Europe wielding labrys weapons. Amazons ruled with a dual-queen system in which one queen was in charge of the army and battle, and the other queen stayed behind to lead the conquered cities. Amazons were known to be ferocious and merciless in battle, but once victorious they ruled with justice. Today, the labrys is a lesbian and feminist symbol of strength and self-sufficiency.

In addition, the labrys also played a part in ancient mythology. Demeter, the goddess of the earth, used a labrys as her scepter. Rites associated with the worship of Demeter, as well as Hecate (the goddess of the underworld), are believed to have involved lesbian sex.

Lavender Rhino

The lavender rhino is an obscure symbol from the 1970s. Supposedly used as an activist symbol, it was chosen because the rhino is generally a peaceful animal, but

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when provoked becomes extremely ferocious.

The lavender rhinoceros was created as a symbol to increase awareness of the presence of gays and lesbians in society. It was created by two Boston artists, Daniel Thaxton and Bernie Toale. Its first appearance was in a series of Boston subway posters during 1973. The rhinoceros is characterized by a peaceful demeanor until threatened, and thus it seemed an apt symbol in the years following Stonewall. The heart on the rhinoceros reflects the common humanity of all people, and the color lavender is a symbol of glbt identity. The original image was purposely not copyrighted so it is in the public domain.

The color lavender is often used to denote homosexuality, although the origins of its use are not clear. It may be the result of combining the colors red and blue (representing female and male influences respectively), thereby creating a fusion of genders. Lavender became popular in American lesbian circles in the 1930s as a colloquial term for other lesbians.



Bear Pride Flag

"Bear" is an affectionate term used for a gay man with an abundance of body hair, especially on his face and chest. Bears also tend to be a bit older and chubbier, but this is a convenient stereotype. The Bear Pride Flag symbolizes this group. It was developed by a Seattle bear bar named Spags. The blue stripes represents the sky and the green stripe represent the earth. In between these two are all the bears of the world- white for polar bears, black for black bears, and brown for brown bears. The yellow paw print is the sun, representing the spirit. While this is the most widely seen bear symbol, it is not really official. Bear groups tend to develop their own individual flags and symbols to represent them.

Rainbow Flag

The rainbow flag has become the easily-recognized

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colors of pride for the gay community. The rainbow plays a part in many myths and stories related to gender and sexuality issues in Greek, Aboriginal, African, and other cultures. Use of the rainbow flag by the gay community began in 1978 when it first appeared in the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Freedom Day Parade. Borrowing symbolism from the hippie movement and black civil rights groups, San Francisco artist Gilbert Baker designed the rainbow flag in response to a need for a symbol that could be used year after year. The flag has six stripes, each color representing a component of the community: red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sun, green for nature, royal blue for harmony, and violet for spirit.

The rainbow flag has inspired a wide variety of related symbols and accessories, such as freedom rings. There are plenty of variations of the flag, including versions with superimposed lambdas, pink triangles, or other symbols.

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