

## Symbols of LGBT Pride

Listed below are some of the symbols that have been adopted by LGBT people and their allies and the significance of each.



Double Women's Symbol is a representation of women loving women.



Double Men's Symbol is a representation of men loving men.



The Pink Triangle

The history of the pink triangle begins before WWII, during Adolf Hitler's rise to power. Paragraph 175, a clause in German law prohibiting same-gender sexual relations, was revised by Hitler in 1935 to include kissing, embracing, and gay fantasies, as well as sexual acts. Convicted offenders—an estimated 25,000 people just from 1937 to 1939—were sent to prison and later to concentration camps. As punishment, they were sterilized, often through castration. In 1942, Hitler increased the punishment to death.

Each prisoner in the concentration camps was forced to wear a colored inverted triangle to indicate their reason for incarceration, and hence the designation also created a type of social hierarchy. 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 men suspected of being gay; a yellow Star of David under a superimposed pink triangle marked the lowest of all prisoners: a gay Jew.

Stories from the camps indicate that gay prisoners were often given the worst tasks and labors. Pink triangle prisoners were also frequently attacked by the guards and even by some other inmates. Although gay prisoners reportedly were not shipped en masse to the death camps at Auschwitz, many gay men were among the non-Jews who were killed there. Estimates of the number of gay men killed during the Nazi regime range from 50,000 to twice that figure. When the war was finally over, many gay men continued to be imprisoned in the camps, because Paragraph 175 remained the law in West Germany until 1969.

In the 1970s, gay liberation groups resurrected the pink triangle as a popular symbol for the lesbian and gay rights movement. Not only is the symbol easily recognized, but it

draws attention to oppression and persecution—then and now, In the 1980s, ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) began using the pink triangle to draw attention to the impact of AIDS on the gay community. They inverted the symbol, making it point up, to signify an active fight back rather than a passive resignation to fate. For many people today, the pink triangle represents pride, solidarity, and a promise never to allow a Holocaust to happen again.



### The Black Triangle

Like the pink triangle, the black triangle is also rooted in Nazi Germany. Although lesbians were not included in the Paragraph 175 prohibition on same-gender sexuality, some seem to have been imprisoned for "anti-social behavior" and designated with a black triangle. As the pink triangle has historically been a male symbol, the black triangle has similarly been reclaimed by lesbians and feminists as a symbol of pride and solidarity.



### Bisexual Triangles

Developed in 1987 by Liz Nania, the bisexual triangles or bi angles consist of pink and blue triangles that overlap to form a purple triangle. As pink and blue have traditionally signified female and male, respectively, the purple represents the attraction of bisexuals to individuals of different genders. The use of the pink triangle also links the symbol to the oppression of people who love others of the same gender, which bisexuals have likewise experienced.



### The Rainbow Flag

Displayed with the red stripe at the top, the rainbow flag was designed by Gilbert Baker in 1978 to celebrate the diversity of the lesbian and gay community. It is recognized by the International Congress of Flag Makers as a symbol of lesbian and gay pride. The rainbow colors themselves now appear on all types of objects, including necklaces, bracelets, bumper stickers, t-shirts, and coffee mugs.



Bi Pride Flag

Created by Michael Page in-1998 to increase bisexual visibility, the bi pride flag has quickly been adopted by many groups around the world. The top pink color represents attraction to people of the same gender (lesbian and gay), the bottom blue color represents attraction to people of a different gender (heterosexual), and the resulting overlap of purple represents bisexuality, or attraction to people of either gender. The key to understanding the symbolism in the bi pride flag is to recognize that the purple blends unnoticeably into both the pink and blue, just as bisexuals often blend unnoticeably into both the lesbian/gay and straight communities.



The Labrys

A double-headed axe that has been adopted as a symbol of power and pride by many lesbians and feminists of all sexual orientations. Often carried by all-female Amazon tribes, the labrys appears in art dating back to ancient Crete and Greece.



The Lambda

The eleventh letter of the Greek alphabet, lambda represents synergy, the concept that the whole is greater than its independent parts. Spartan platoons consisting solely of men who loved men are said to have had this symbol emblazoned on their shields. In 1970, the Gay Activist Alliance in New York chose the lambda as a symbol of gay liberation, and in 1974, the first International Gay Rights Conference adopted it as an international symbol. Initially, some gay men used the lambda as a way to meet each other without fear of discrimination.



Freedom Rings

Designed by David Spada using the colors of the rainbow flag, these six aluminum rings have come to symbolize interdependence and the celebration of diversity. The rings were widely adopted by lesbians and gay men in the 1990s and are still frequently found on necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and key chains.



## Human Rights Campaign

The Human Rights Campaign, the largest national lesbian and gay political organization, envisions an America where lesbian and gay people are ensured of their basic equal rights—and can be open, honest and safe at home, at work and in the community. HRC has more than 360,000 members, both gay and non-gay -- all committed to making this vision a reality.

Adapted from Daniel Sullivan, JD  
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