

LGBT symbols

The LGBT community has adopted certain symbols for self-identification to demonstrate unity, pride, shared values, and allegiance to one another. **LGBT symbols** communicate ideas, concepts, and identity both within their communities and to mainstream culture. The two most-recognized international LGBT symbols are the pink triangle and the rainbow flag.

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Flags

Rainbow

Gilbert Baker designed the [rainbow Pride flag](#) for the 1978 [San Francisco Gay Freedom Day](#) celebration. He designed the flag as a "symbol of hope" and liberation, and an alternative to the symbolism of the pink triangle.^[1] The flag does not depict an actual rainbow. Rather, the colors of the rainbow are displayed as horizontal stripes, with red at the top and violet at the bottom. It represents the diversity of gays and lesbians around the world. In the original eight-color version, pink stood for sexuality, red for life, orange for healing, yellow for the sun, green for nature, turquoise for art, indigo for harmony, and violet for spirit.^[2] A copy of the original 20-by-30 foot, eight-color flag was remade by Baker in 2000, and was installed in the [Castro district](#) in San Francisco.^[3] Many variations on the rainbow flag exist, including incorporating other LGBT symbols like the triangle or lambda.^[4]



Original eight-stripe version designed by Gilbert Baker (1978)



Seven-stripe version with hot pink color removed due to a lack of fabric (1978-1979)



Six-stripes version with turquoise color removed and indigo color changed to royal blue (1979-present)

Aromanticism



Aromantic flag

The aromantic pride flag consists of five horizontal stripes, which, from top to bottom, are: green, light green, white, gray, and black. In this order, the stripes represent aromanticism, the aromantic spectrum, aesthetic attraction, gray-aromantic and demiromantic people, and the sexuality spectrum.^[5]

Asexuality



Asexual pride, created in 2010

The asexual pride flag consists of four horizontal stripes: black, gray, white, and purple from top to bottom.^{[6][7]} The flag was created by Asexual Visibility and Education Network user standup in August 2010, as part of a community effort to create and choose a flag.^[8] The black stripe represents asexuality; the gray stripe represents gray-asexuals and demisexuals; the white stripe represents allies; and the purple stripe represents community.^{[9][10]}

Bear culture



International Bear Brotherhood, created in 1995

Bear is an affectionate gay slang term for those in the bear communities, a subculture in the gay community and an emerging subset of the LGBT community with its own events, codes, and a culture-specific identity. Bears tend to have hairy bodies and facial hair; some are heavy-set; some project an image of working-class masculinity in their grooming and appearance, though none of these are requirements or unique indicators. The bear concept can function as an identity, an affiliation, and an ideal to live up to. There is ongoing debate in bear communities about what constitutes a bear. Some state that self-identifying as a bear is the only requirement, while others argue that bears must have certain physical characteristics, such as a hairy chest and face,

a large body, or a certain mode of dress and behavior.

Bears are almost always gay or bisexual men; transgender men attracted to other men are increasingly included within bear communities.^[11] The bear community has spread all over the world, with bear clubs in many countries. Bear clubs often serve as social and sexual networks for older, hairier, sometimes heavier gay and bisexual men, and members often contribute to their local gay communities through fundraising and other functions. Bear events are common in heavily gay communities.

The International Bear Brotherhood Flag was designed in 1995 by Craig Byrnes.^[12]

Bisexuality



Bisexual pride, created in 1998

Introduced on December 5, 1998,^[13] the bisexual pride flag was designed by Michael Page to represent and increase visibility of bisexuals in the LGBT community and society as a whole. Page chose a combination of Pantone Matching System (PMS) colors magenta (pink), lavender (purple), and royal (blue).^[13] The finished rectangular flag consists of a broad pink stripe at the top, a broad stripe in blue at the bottom, and a narrow purple stripe in the center.

Page described the meaning of the colors as, "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)."^[13] He also described the flag's meaning in deeper terms, stating "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 bi people blend unnoticeably into both the gay/lesbian and straight communities."^[13]

The blue and pink overlapping triangle symbol represents bisexuality and bi pride. The origin of the symbol, sometimes facetiously referred to as the "biangles", is largely unknown; however, some postulations describe the colors as "pink represents attraction to women and the blue attraction to men,

or the pink represents homosexuality, the blue heterosexuality and the purple bisexuality."^[9]

Intersex



Intersex pride, created in 2013

Intersex people are those who do not exhibit all the biological characteristics of male or female, or exhibit a combination of characteristics, at birth. Between 0.05% and 1.7% of the population is estimated to have intersex traits.^{[14][15]}

The intersex flag was created by Morgan Carpenter of Intersex Human Rights Australia in July 2013 to create a flag "that is not derivative, but is yet firmly grounded in meaning". The organization describes the circle as "unbroken and unornamented, symbolising wholeness and completeness, and our potentialities. We are still fighting for bodily autonomy and genital integrity, and this symbolises the right to be who and how we want to be".^{[16][17][18]}

Lesbian

No single flag design for a lesbian pride flag has been widely adopted.^[19] However, many widely used ones exist:

The labrys lesbian flag was created in 1999 by graphic designer Sean Campbell, and published in June 2000 in the Palm Springs edition of the *Gay and Lesbian Times* Pride issue.^{[10][19][20]} The design involves a labrys, a type of double-headed axe, superimposed on the downward-pointing black triangle, set against a violet background. Among its functions, the labrys was associated as a weapon used by the Amazons of mythology.^{[21][22]} In the 1970s it was adopted as a symbol of empowerment by the lesbian feminist community.^{[23][24]} Women considered asocial by the Third Reich, which included homosexual females, because they did not conform to the Nazi ideal of a woman were condemned to concentration camps^[25] and wore an downward-pointing black triangle badge to identify them.^[26] Some lesbians reclaimed this symbol as gay men reclaimed the pink triangle (many lesbians also reclaimed the pink triangle although lesbians were not included in Paragraph 175 of the German criminal code).^[26] The color violet became associated with lesbians via the poetry of Sappho.^[27]

The "pink" lesbian flag consists of six shades of red and pink colors with a white bar in the center.^{[28][29]} and is derived from the lipstick lesbian flag, which includes a red kiss^[29] (which was introduced in the weblog *This Lesbian Life* in 2010).^[28] The lipstick lesbian flag represents "homosexual women who have a more feminine gender expression"^[30] and has not been widely adopted;^[19] however, its non-kiss "pink" variant attracted more use.

A new lesbian flag modeled after the seven-band "pink" flag was introduced on Tumblr in 2018, with colors dark orange representing "gender non-conformity", orange for "independence", light orange for "community", white for "unique relationships to womanhood", pink for "serenity and peace", dusty pink for "love and sex", and dark rose for "femininity".^[31] A five-stripes version was soon derived from the 2018 colors.^[32] In 2020, controversy arose over who had actually introduced an orange-pink lesbian flag.^[33]



Labrys lesbian flag
created in 1999



Pink lesbian flag
derived from the 2010
Lipstick lesbian flag



Lesbian flag created in
2018



Five-stripes version of
the 2018 flag

Non-binary



Nonbinary pride flag,
created in 2014

The non-binary flag was created in 2014 by activist Kye Rowan.^[34] Each stripe color represents different types of non-binary identities: Yellow for people who identify outside of the gender binary, white for nonbinary people with multiple genders, purple for those with a mixture of both male and female genders, and black for agender individuals.^[35]

Under the non-binary umbrella are all those who identify off the gender binary. There are many different identities within this category including androgyny, genderqueerness (which includes agender, ceterosexual,^[36] gender fluid, intergender), third gender, and transgender.^{[37][38]}

Pansexuality



Pansexual pride flag,
created in 2010

The pansexual pride flag was introduced in October 2010 in a Tumblr blog ("Pansexual Pride Flag").^[39] It has three horizontal bars that are pink, yellow and blue.^{[39][40][41]} "The pink represents being attracted to women, the blue being attracted to men, and the yellow for being attracted to everyone else.";^[39] such as non-binary gender, agender, bigender or genderfluid.^{[41][9][42][43]}

A "P" with the tail converted to an arrow with a cross is also sometimes used. It predates the flag and is still in use today. The cross on the "P"'s tail refers to the cross on the Venus or female symbol (♀), and the arrow refers to the arrow on the Mars or male symbol (♂).^[44] While it does not technically have a name, it is sometimes colloquially referred to as "the pansexual symbol"

Transgender



Transgender pride flag,
created in 1999

The Transgender Pride Flag was designed by transgender woman Monica Helms in 1999.^[45] It was first shown at a pride parade in Phoenix, Arizona, US, in 2000.^[46] It was flown from a large public flagpole in San Francisco's Castro District beginning November 19, 2012, in commemoration of the Transgender Day of Remembrance.^[46] The flag represents the transgender community and consists of five horizontal stripes: two light blue, two pink, with a white stripe in the center. Helms described the meaning of the flag as follows:

"The stripes at the top and bottom are light blue, the traditional color for baby boys. The stripes next to them are pink, the traditional color for baby girls.^[46] The white stripe is for people that are nonbinary, feel that they don't have a gender."^{[47][48]} The pattern is such that no matter which way you fly it, it is always correct, signifying us finding correctness in our lives.^[46]

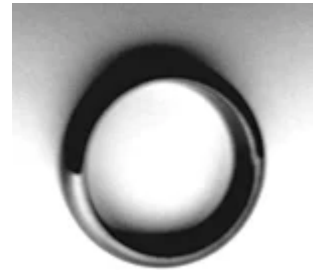
Philadelphia became the first county government in the U.S. to raise the transgender pride flag in 2015. It was raised at City Hall in honor of Philadelphia's 14th Annual Trans Health Conference, and remained next to the US and City of Philadelphia flags for the entirety of the conference. Then-Mayor Michael Nutter gave a speech in honor of the trans community's acceptance in Philadelphia.^[49]

Other symbols

In addition to major symbols of the LGBT community, other symbols have been used to represent members' unity, pride, shared values, and allegiance to one another.

Ace ring

A black ring (also known as an ace ring) worn on the middle finger of one's right hand is a way asexual people signify their asexuality. The ring is deliberately worn in a similar manner as one would a wedding ring to symbolize marriage. Use of the symbol began in 2005.^{[50][51]}



Ace ring

Ace cards

Due to the phonetic shortening from asexual to ace, ace playing cards are sometimes used to represent asexuality. The ace of hearts and ace of spades are used to symbolize romantic asexuality and aromantic asexuality respectively.^[52] Likewise, the ace of clubs is used to symbolize gray asexuality and gray-aromantics, and the ace of diamonds is used to symbolize demi-romantics and demisexuals.^[53]

Blue feather

In the Society for Creative Anachronism, LGBT members often wear a dark blue feather to indicate an affiliation with Clan Blue Feather, a group of SCA members promoting the study of LGBT culture and people in the Middle Ages.^[54] Because of this affiliation, blue feathers have also been used at some Renaissance Faires and Pagan events.

Calamus plant

According to some interpretations, American poet Walt Whitman used the calamus plant to represent homoerotic love.^[55]



*Acorus
calamus*

Double-gender



Lesbian and gay
interlocked gender
sex symbols

Interlocked gender symbols. Each gender symbol derives from the astronomical symbol for the planet Venus and Mars. In modern science, the singular symbol for Venus is used to represent the female sex, and singular symbol for Mars is used to represent the male sex.^[56] Two interlocking female symbols (♀) represent a lesbian or the lesbian community, and two interlocking male symbols (♂) a gay male or the gay male community.^{[23][57]}

The symbols first appeared in the 1970s.^[57]

Freedom rings

Freedom rings, designed by David Spada, are six aluminum rings, each in one of the colors of the rainbow flag. They were released in 1991. Symbolizing happiness and diversity, these rings are worn by themselves or as part of necklaces, bracelets, and key chains.^[58]

They are sometimes referred to as "Fruit Loops".^[59]

Handkerchief code

In some New York City gay circles of the early 20th century, gay men wore a red necktie or bow tie as a subtle signal.^[60] In the 1970s, the handkerchief (or hanky) code emerged in the form of bandanas, worn in back pockets, in colors that signaled sexual interests, fetishes, and if the wearer was a "top" or "bottom".^{[61][62]}

High five

There are many origin stories of the high five,^[63] but the two most documented candidates are Dusty Baker and Glenn Burke of the Los Angeles Dodgers professional baseball team on October 2, 1977, and Wiley Brown and Derek Smith of the Louisville Cardinals men's basketball team during the 1978–1979 season.^{[64][65]} In any case, after retiring from baseball, Burke, who was one of the first openly gay professional athletes, used the high five with other gay residents of the Castro district of San Francisco, where for many it became a symbol of gay pride and identification.^[64]

Lambda

In 1970, graphic designer Tom Doerr selected the lower-case Greek letter lambda to be the symbol of the New York chapter of the Gay Activists Alliance.^{[66][67]} The alliance's literature states that Doerr chose the symbol specifically for its denotative meaning in the context of chemistry and physics: "a complete



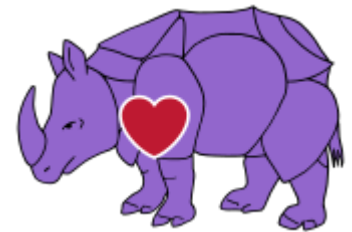
The Greek
letter lambda
(Λ, λ)

exchange of energy—that moment or span of time witness to absolute activity".^[66]

The lambda became associated with Gay Liberation,^{[68][69]} and in December 1974, it was officially declared the international symbol for gay and lesbian rights by the International Gay Rights Congress in Edinburgh, Scotland.^[70] The gay rights organization Lambda Legal and the American Lambda Literary Foundation derive their names from this symbol.

Lavender rhinoceros

Daniel Thaxton and Bernie Toale created a lavender rhinoceros symbol for a public ad campaign to increase visibility for gay people in Boston helmed by Gay Media Action-Advertising; Toale said they chose a rhinoceros because "it is a much maligned and misunderstood animal" and that it was lavender because that is a mix of pink and blue, making it a symbolic merger of the feminine and masculine. However, in May 1974, Metro Transit Advertising said its lawyers could not "determine eligibility of the public service rate" for the lavender rhinoceros ads, which tripled the cost of the ad campaign. Gay Media Action challenged this, but were unsuccessful. The lavender rhinoceros symbol was seen on signs, pins, and t-shirts at the Boston Pride Parade later in 1974, and a life-sized papier-mâché lavender rhinoceros was part of the parade. Money was raised for the ads, and they began running on the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's Green Line by December 3, 1974, and ran there until February 1975. The lavender rhinoceros continued as a symbol of the gay community, appearing at the 1976 Boston Pride Parade and on a flag that was raised at Boston City Hall in 1987.^[71]



A lavender rhinoceros
symbol

Purple hand

On October 31, 1969, sixty members of the Gay Liberation Front, the Committee for Homosexual Freedom (CHF), and the Gay Guerilla Theatre group staged a protest outside the offices of the *San Francisco Examiner* in response to a series of news articles disparaging people in San Francisco's gay bars and clubs.^{[72][73][74][75]} The peaceful protest against the *Examiner* turned tumultuous and was later called "Friday of the Purple Hand" and "Bloody Friday of the Purple Hand".^{[75][76][77][78][79][80]} *Examiner* employees "dumped a barrel of printers' ink on the crowd from the roof of the newspaper building", according to gltbq.com.^[81] Some reports state that it was a barrel of ink poured from the roof of the building.^[82] The protestors "used the ink to scrawl slogans on the building walls" and slap purple hand prints "throughout downtown [San Francisco]" resulting in "one of the most visible demonstrations of gay power" according to the *Bay Area Reporter*.^{[75][77][80]} According to Larry LittleJohn, then president of Society for Individual Rights, "At that point, the tactical squad arrived – not to get the employees who dumped the ink, but to arrest the demonstrators. Somebody could have been hurt if that ink had gotten into their eyes, but the police were knocking people to the ground."^[75] The accounts of police brutality include women being thrown to the ground and protesters' teeth being knocked out.^{[75][83]} Inspired by Black Hand extortion methods of Camorra gangsters and the Mafia,^[84] some gay and lesbian activists attempted to institute "purple hand" as a warning to stop anti-gay attacks, but with little success. In Turkey, the LGBT rights organization MorEl Eskişehir LGBTT Oluşumu (Purple Hand Eskişehir LGBT Formation), also bears the name of this symbol.^[85]

Transgender

A symbol of the female (♀), male (♂) and Genderqueer (⚧) symbols combined around a circle (⚧) is used to represent transgender people.^{[86][87]}



Transgender symbol

Unicorns



Unicorn in Portland Pride, 2017

Unicorns have become a symbol of LGBT culture due to earlier associations between the animal and rainbows being extended to the rainbow flag created in 1978 by Gilbert Baker.^[88]

Language of flowers

Green carnation

In 19th-century England, green indicated homosexual affiliations, as popularized by gay author Oscar Wilde, who often wore one on his lapel.^{[89][90]}



Green carnation

Violets



Viola uliginosa flower




Violets and their color became a special code used by lesbians and bisexual women.^{[91][92][93]} The symbolism of the flower derives from several fragments of poems by Sappho in which she describes a lover wearing garlands or a crown with violets.^{[94][95]} In 1926, the play *La Prisonnière* by Édouard Bourdet used a bouquet of violets to signify lesbian love.^[96] When the play became subject to censorship, many Parisian lesbians wore violets to demonstrate solidarity with its lesbian subject matter.^[97]

Triangle badges of the Third Reich

One of the oldest of these symbols is the downward-pointing pink triangle that male homosexuals in Nazi concentration camps were required to wear on their clothing. The badge is one of several badges that internees wore to identify what kind of prisoners they were.^[98] Many of the estimated 5,000–15,000 gay men and lesbians imprisoned in concentration camps died during the Holocaust.^[99] The pink triangle was later reclaimed by gay men, as well as some lesbians, in various political movements as a symbol of personal pride and remembrance.^{[100][26]} AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) adopted the downward-pointing pink triangle to symbolize the "active fight back" against HIV/AIDS "rather than a passive resignation to fate."^[101]

The pink triangle was used exclusively with male prisoners, as lesbians were not included under Paragraph 175, a statute which made homosexual acts between males a crime. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) stipulates that this was because women were seen as subordinate to men, and the Nazi state did not feel that homosexual women presented the same threat to masculinity as homosexual men. According to USHMM, many women were arrested and imprisoned for

"asocial" behavior, a classification applied to those who did not conform to the Nazi ideal of a woman's role: cooking, cleaning, kitchen work, child raising, and passivity. Asocial women were tagged with an downward-pointing black triangle.^[25] Many lesbians reclaimed this symbol for themselves as gay men reclaimed the pink triangle.^[26]

Pink Triangle	Black Triangle	Pink & Yellow Triangles
		
The downward-pointing pink triangle used to identify homosexual men in the concentration camps.	The downward-pointing black triangle used to mark individuals considered "asocial". The category included homosexual women, nonconformists, sex workers, <u>nomads</u> , <u>Romani</u> , and others.	The downward-pointing pink triangle overlapping a yellow triangle was used to single out male homosexual prisoners who were <u>Jewish</u> .

Gallery

These LGBT flags represent the LGBT movement as a whole with sexual orientations, gender identities, subcultures, and regional purposes.

LGBT pride flags



LGBT/Gay pride



Agender^[102]



Aromantic^[103]



Asexual



Bigender^{[104][105]}



Bisexual



Demisexual^[106]



Genderfluid^[102]



Genderqueer^[102]



Intersex



The labrys lesbian flag, created in 1999^[19]



Lesbian flag created in 2010 (based on Lipstick lesbian flag)



Lesbian flag created in 2018



Variant of the 2018 lesbian flag with five stripes



Non-binary



Pansexual



Polysexual^[107]



Transgender

Subculture flags



Bear Brotherhood



Leather Pride flag^[29]



Illustration of lipstick lesbian flag^[29]

Location-based flags



Philadelphia, United States People of color pride flag^[108]



South Africa Gay pride flag of South Africa^[109]

Symbols



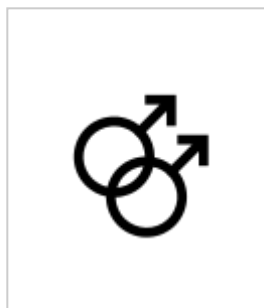
Biangles
(represents
Bisexuality)



Double moon
(represents
Bisexuality)^[110]



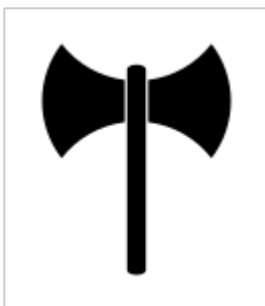
Double female
symbol
(represents
Lesbian
women)^[23]



Double male
symbol
(represents
Gay
men)



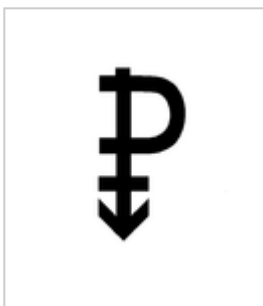
Interlocking
gender symbols



Labrys
(represents
Lesbian
feminism)^{[23][24][111]}



Lambda
(represents
Gay
Liberation)



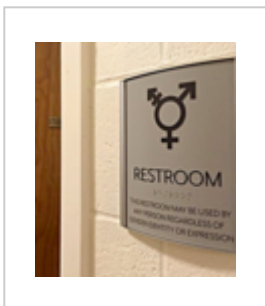
Pansexual
symbol



Transgender
symbol



Trans
symbol feminist
symbol



Transgender
symbol denoting
gender-neutral
restroom

See also

- LGBT slogans
- White Knot

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- [LGBTQIA+ Flags and Symbols \(https://www.odu.edu/life/diversity/resources/lgbtqa/symbols\)](https://www.odu.edu/life/diversity/resources/lgbtqa/symbols) shows images of some of these symbols and offers a brief historical account of each.
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