

Some Symbols Used in LGBT Subcultures



The Rainbow Flag.

In 1978, San Francisco artist Gilbert Baker designed a flag for that city's Gay Freedom celebration. The flag has since been adopted by LGBT movements nationally and internationally. It has six stripes, each a different color ranging from purple to red.



The Bi Pride Flag.

This flag was designed by Michael Page in 1998. It consists of two colors—pink (representing same-sex attraction) and blue (representing opposite-sex attraction) meeting in the middle to form a purple stripe, representing attraction to both sexes.



The Lambda.

In 1970, the Gay Activist Alliance chose the Greek letter lambda as their symbol, because a flag with a lambda on it was carried by a regiment of Greek warriors who were accompanied into battle by their younger male lovers and were noted for their fierceness and willingness to fight to the death. Many LGBT organizations since 1970 have taken lambda as their symbol or part of their name.



The Pink Triangle.

Under the Nazi regime, concentration camp prisoners wore colored triangles that indicated their classification and thus the reason why they were considered enemies of the state. Just as Jews wore two superimposed yellow triangles, gay men wore pink triangles. When the Allies liberated the camps in 1945, most survivors were freed, but the US Army simply transferred those wearing pink triangles to other prisons. Gays and lesbians now use the pink triangle as a symbol of identification and solidarity against oppression.



The Black Triangle.

Just as gay men were forced to wear pink triangles in the concentration camps, many lesbians were forced to wear black triangles, which signified that they (like prostitutes and unmarried women of the streets) did not live according to the Nazis' ideas of correct female behavior.



The Red Ribbon

The red ribbon first emerged in 1991 as a symbol for the worldwide effort against AIDS. The color red was chosen for its association with blood, and also to suggest passion, including both anger and love.



Double Venus.

The symbol for the planet Venus is also the alchemical symbol for woman. Lesbians use two such symbols overlapping to mean “woman loving woman.”



Double Mars.

The symbol for the planet Mars is also the alchemical symbol for man. Gay men use two such symbols overlapping to mean “man loving man.”



Mercury

The symbol for the planet Mercury is used to represent the transgendered community. This may be partly based on ancient mythology, in which the god Mercury fathered a child named Hermaphroditus, who had both male and female sex organs. The crescent shape and the cross in the symbol represent (respectively) the male and the female, balanced in the individual (the circle.)



The Labrys.

A double-bladed axe served as the scepter of the goddess Demeter (or Artemis, who was also known as Diana in Roman mythology). Such a weapon may once have been used by Scythian warriors. It appears in ancient Cretan art and is now often used as a symbol of lesbianism.

Adapted from definitions by Dr. Ladelle McWhorter, 1996

Original symbol list adapted from Vernon Wall's 1992 adaptation

Images # 1-6 and # 10, and the descriptions of # 6 and 10, are from <http://jasewells.com/gayicons/>
 Images # 7, 8, and 9 are from <http://www.safeplace.mtu.edu/>