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If you're among the [4.5% of American](#) adults that identify as LGBTQ, that's awesome. While it's inarguably difficult to be queer in a predominantly hetero-normative world, there's a lot of beauty in loving who you love. Plus, you're part of an amazing and empowering community that always has your back!

Community is one of the best things about being LGBTQ+, which means you've likely wondered how queer people have found each other throughout history.

To answer that, let's explore the most popular historical gay symbols that have shaped our community.

5 Historical Gay Symbols

Below are five symbols that LGBTQ+ people have used to show off their pride, both past and present.

1. Rainbow Flag

The rainbow pride flag is by far the most recognizable symbol of homosexuality in the 21st century. The use of this flag originated in 1978 when it was first used at the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Freedom Day Parade. From there, it became a widespread symbol of being proud of loving who you loved.

Today, there are [many variations](#) of this flag. Black and brown stripes have been added in some instances to show support for queer people of color. There are also pride flags for other queer communities, including the pink-and-red lesbian pride flag, the white/pastel pink and blue trans flag, and the pink, blue, and purple bisexual pride flag.

The modern pride flag (shown below) now includes stripes to represent the experiences of people of color, as well as stripes to represent people who identify as transgender, gender nonconforming (GNC) and/or undefined.

Each color on the original rainbow flag is a demonstration of individuality and solidarity. These colors can now be seen on many pride-oriented items such as necklaces, rings, hats, and more.

People often wear rainbow apparel to show that they're LGBT and are proud of it, which leads to them finding other members of the community more easily.



2. Green Carnations

Nearly a century before the rainbow pride flag came onto the scene, LGBT people- most notably gay men- used another symbol to identify and connect with each other.

The [green carnation](#) was to be worn in the buttonhole of a man's suit starting in the late 1800s. It was a symbol of the aesthetic movement as well as loving whoever you chose to love.

This symbol was first brought into the gay community by talented playwright Oscar Wilde, an LGBT icon if there ever was one. He had an actor wear one of these synthetically-dyed flowers onto the stage during a production of *Lady Windermere's Fan*. The unnatural, dyed flower was deemed unusual and beautiful, though Wilde laughed that it was simply beautiful for the sake of being beautiful.

From there, men began to wear the flower as a show of support for Wilde and his aesthetic 'beauty for beauty's own sake' philosophy. It became associated with homosexuality, too, since Wilde was a known lover of men. When Wilde was prosecuted for loving men, people wore the green carnation to show support and solidarity.

To this day, the green carnation is remembered as one of the first—if not the first—popular symbols of the gay community.



3. Inverted Pink Triangle

Trigger warning for Holocaust mention

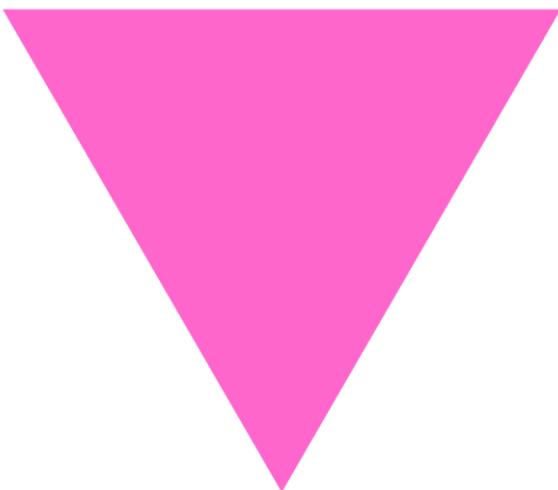
However, not all symbols of the LGBT community are like the green carnation in that they're rooted in humor and pride. The inverted pink triangle is one of the oldest and most persistent symbols of homosexuality today. Despite its current resilience, its beginnings are incredibly sad.

During WWII in Nazi Germany, gay people were targeted during the holocaust. Gay prisoners in concentration camps were forced to wear an inverted pink triangle on their clothes to denote their reason for being in the camps. This would out them to the other prisoners and force them into a social hierarchy within the camps.

You're likely thinking that this is a terrible symbol for the queer community, but there are layers to it. Like the word 'queer' itself, we have taken back the pink triangle and reclaimed it as a symbol of pride and resilience.

In the 1970s, gay liberation groups brought the inverted pink triangle back onto the scene. It not only was easily recognizable, but it drew attention to the persecution that LGBTQ minority groups have faced throughout history.

Today, the pink triangle lives on as a symbol of pride. There are also black and rainbow variations that other queer people boast.



4. Labrys

There are tons of historical symbols for gay men, which is awesome! But, you may be wondering: what about lesbian pride symbols?

The labrys is a common symbol of both feminism and lesbian pride. It's a double-edged ax that was commonly used in historical matriarchal societies. It now symbolizes the strength and independence of women and lesbians alike.

Often, this symbol will be overlaid on a lesbian pride flag or simple rainbow pride flag to denote that a woman is proud of loving other women.

In addition to the labrys, interlocking Venus symbols (known as the double Venus) represent women who love women. The Venus symbol dates back to the 3rd century, but the double Venus began to be used to show lesbian pride in the 1970s. Since then, cis women and trans women alike have been using this symbol- along with the labrys- to express who they are.

5. Lambda

The lambda is another symbol of queerness that dates back to the 70s. Tom Doerr, a graphic designer, chose this Greek letter as a symbol of New York's Gay Activist Alliance.

This happened one year after the [Stonewall riots](#), so the gay rights movement was at the forefront of people's minds.

But why the lambda? Doerr said that the symbol represented "a complete exchange of energy." He also said that it "signifies a commitment among men and women to achieve and defend their human rights as homosexual citizens." Because of this, those who campaigned for LGBT rights used it to show that they supported equality and their support for other human beings.

However, the lambda wasn't truly popularized until 1974. The International Gay Rights Congress took the symbol and used it for their Edinburgh-based organization, which solidified its importance in the LGBT community.

