LGBTQ+

Guidebook for Inclusive Visual Storytelling

HELPFUL PRACTICE TO IMPROVE REPRESENTATION

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At Getty Images, we believe in the power of images to inspire and spark change — elevate diverse narratives that can alter perceptions, evoke empathy, and build community.

Getty Images and GLAAD developed an LGTBQ+ Visual Storytelling Guidebook to inspire the media and advertising industries to be more inclusive and thoughtful in their visual selections of the LGBTQ+ community. The Guidebook includes insights on why intersectionality in LGTBQ+ storytelling matters, the important role of gender identity and transgender representation, and questions to help guide you to be more inclusive in your visual choices.

GLAAD rewrites the script for LGBTQ acceptance. As a dynamic media force, GLAAD tackles tough issues to shape the narrative and provoke dialogue that leads to cultural change. GLAAD protects all that has been accomplished and creates a world where everyone can live the life they love.

Getty Images is one of the most trusted and esteemed sources of visual content in the world, with over 435 million assets including photos, videos, and music, available through its industry-leading sites www.gettyimages.com and www.istock.com. The Getty Images website serves creative, business and media customers in nearly every country in the world and is the first place people turn to discover, purchase and share powerful visual content from the world's best photographers and videographers

Table of Contents

This practical guidebook was created to help marketers select and create visual content that promotes an authentic, unbiased, and inclusive representation of the LGBTQ+ community that works for your brand and advances the cause of LGBTQ+ equality.

Introduction

Increased acceptance demands increased representation

In recent years, big changes in acceptance and understanding have increased LGBTQ+ visibility in marketing and the media. In some ways, there seems to be more support than ever for LGBTQ+ people in the public eye. According to the LGBTQ Inclusion in Advertising and Media, Advertiser and Agency Perspectives study:

75%

of non-LGBTQ respondents are 'very comfortable' seeing LGBTQ people in ads[1]

68%

of non-LGBTQ consumers feel better about buying products from companies that feature LGBTQ people in ads[2]

But this upbeat sentiment can be misleading.

Just as the LGBTQ+ community appears to be gaining more acceptance, research shows that **LGBTQ+ people remain grossly underrepresented in media**. A 2018 study by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media found

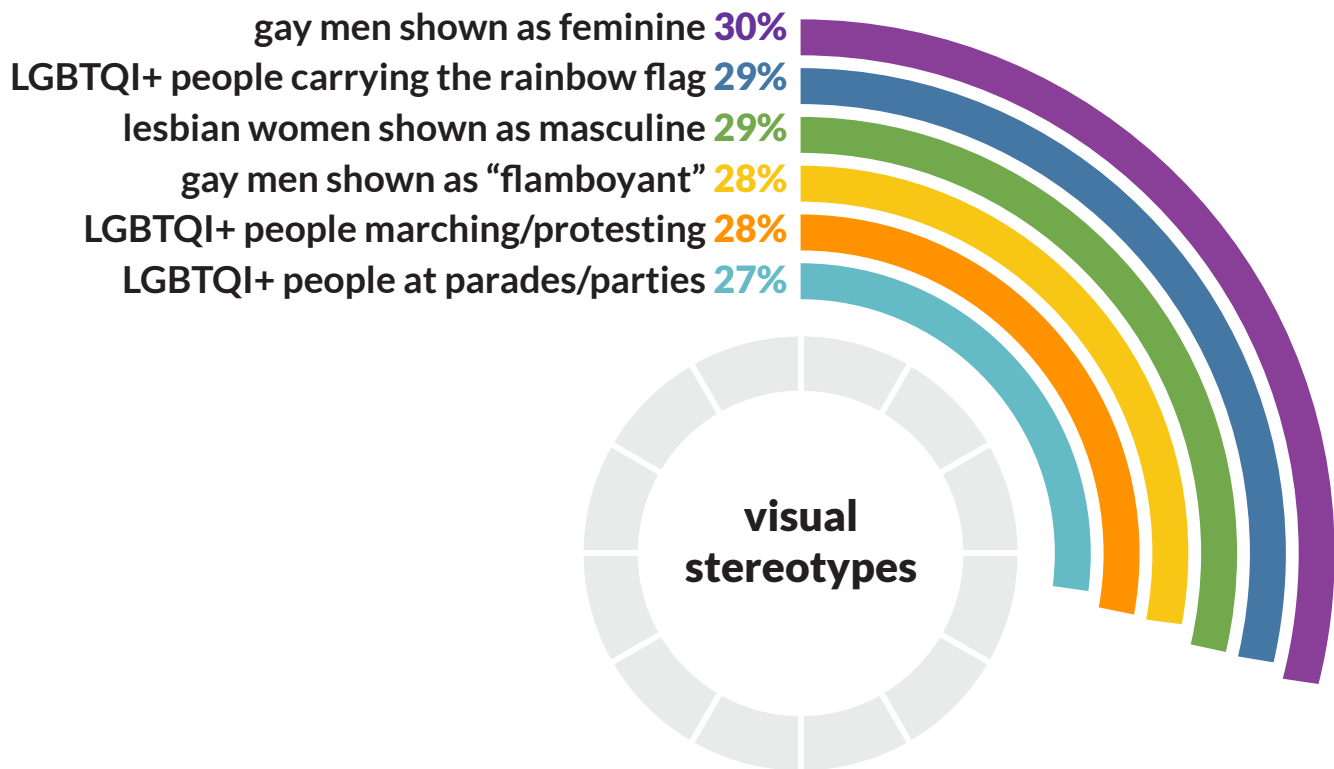only **1.8%** of characters in ads from the annual Cannes Lions festival were LGBTQ+.[3]

Getty Images' proprietary data found that from the visuals downloaded in 2020,

less than **1%** include people with LGBTQ+ identities.[4]

Not quite real.

Adding to this challenge is the problem that the images and video that are used are often limited to false or outdated stereotypes and frequently fail to represent the full spectrum of people that make up this diverse and dynamic community. Getty Images' most recent Visual GPS research found that the current portrayal of LGBTQ+ individuals remains narrow and stereotypical[5]:

gay men shown as feminine **30%**
LGBTQI+ people carrying the rainbow flag **29%**
lesbian women shown as masculine **29%**
gay men shown as "flamboyant" **28%**
LGBTQI+ people marching/protesting **28%**
LGBTQI+ people at parades/parties **27%**

visual stereotypes

Feminine men, masculine women, and rainbow flags are all part of the LGBTQ+ community, but those images have been overrepresented and therefore can seem cliché. It's important to include a broad range of images alongside those more commonly used images.

Your chance to connect.

This lack of adequate, authentic representation is a challenge, but also a big opportunity for creatives, marketing professionals, and the broader advertising and media industries. Increasing representation of LGBTQ+ people helps demonstrate a focus on inclusion, and lets you make a very public commitment of your support and interest in appealing to the LGBTQ+ market all year round.

Section One

Understanding the LGBTQ+ community

What's with all the letters and the plus?

It's a long acronym that's added a few letters in recent years. Who makes up the broad and diverse LGBTQ+ community, and what do each of those letters and the plus sign stand for?

The **LGBTQ** stands for **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer**, while the **+** is added to **indicate awareness that there are many other terms people may use to describe their sexual orientation and gender identity**—for example, Pansexual, Asexual, Nonbinary, Genderqueer, Questioning, and more.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer refer to your sexual orientation—who you're romantically attracted to.

More than sexual orientation.

Transgender refers to gender identity (Are you a man, a woman, or a non-binary person? Does that gender identity align with the sex you were assigned at birth?). It's important to note that sexual orientation is different from gender identity and should be treated that way.

QUESTIONS to consider
LGBTQ+ community

Ask yourself

- *Are you using actual LGBTQ+ people as opposed to actors or models to represent the LGBTQ+ community in your visuals?*

- *What scenarios do LGBTQ+ people most commonly appear in? Are you showing LGBTQ+ people at work? At home? At school? Traveling? In places of worship?*

- *Are you only showing LGBTQ+ people in romantic stories or as parents? What about non-partnered LGBTQ+ people living full lives?*

- *Are you showing LGBTQ+ people living fulfilling, positive lives, and having shared experiences both within and outside of their communities? With their friend groups of all identities? With a variety of family structures (e.g., with or without children, multigenerational, etc.)? With colleagues?*

Representation matters. In countries where LGBTQ+ people are represented more in visual content, LGBTQ+ people report less experience with bias.[6]

Section Two

Understanding the role of gender

Going beyond binary.

Many people confuse and conflate biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression. To understand the multilayered concept of gender, it helps to look at all three separately.

Biological sex: *The physical body created by chromosomes, genes, hormones—basically, what the doctor writes on your birth certificate*

Gender identity: *An internal sense of self by which you know your gender—usually man, woman or nonbinary*

Gender expression: *The external cues that we use to communicate gender (name, pronouns, hair length, clothing, etc.)*

Some people have a gender expression that moves fluidly between traditional ideas of masculine and feminine. Men may want to dress in ways that are more traditionally feminine, while women may want to dress in more masculine ways. Having a fluid gender expression is a choice for everyone—not just trans and nonbinary people.

Not all trans people are gender non-conforming. Some trans women are quite feminine, and some trans men are conventionally masculine. People who have a nonbinary gender identity may have an androgynous gender expression—or not! It's unique for every person.

84% agree that 'people should be free to express their gender through clothing, hairstyles, or mannerisms'[7]

78% agree that 'society should not try to enforce conformity to traditional gender roles'[8]

QUESTIONS to consider
Beyond binary

- *Are you showing people who may not fit neatly into a binary definition of gender? (e.g., nonbinary, agender, genderfluid, genderqueer, or other gender nonconforming people?)*

- *Have you considered how your imagery might be reinforcing gender stereotypes? (e.g., gender roles, certain types of dress, certain color choices, etc.)*

- *Are you depicting a diverse range of gender expressions in terms of dress, grooming, etc.?*

- *Have you considered the scenarios where you're featuring gender nonconforming people? Are they being shown within a community or participating in activities of daily life (work, school, etc.)?*

- *Are you including gender nonconforming people with a variety of different sexual orientations?*

- *Do the gender nonconforming people in your imagery represent a diversity of ages, races, and other intersections of identity?*

Gender is a complicated, highly personal part of one's identity. It can differ substantially across cultures and socioeconomic groups, and is an evolving, colorful, and highly important aspect of the LGBTQ+ community that deserves proper visual representation.

Understanding the role of gender

Representing trans.

For transgender people, their gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Visually representing the transgender community is an especially important part of advancing our collective understanding of gender. Transgender people have played a part in cultures and societies throughout history, even though they used different words to describe their experiences.

Findings from Getty Images' Visual GPS research notes that transgender people are the least represented in visuals they see in media; moreover, when they are included, they're mostly portrayed as ostracized from the community.[4] The same findings showed that images featuring transgender people are far less likely to show them experiencing joy, in typical everyday settings, as part of a family, in an office environment or in a position of power. Correcting this erasure with authentic, dynamic imagery can go far in changing perceptions.

Intersectional storytelling in LGBTQ+

Over the last year,
searches on Getty Images using the term 'trans' rose by

+101% [9]

Despite an increase in awareness,
transgender people appear in

<1%
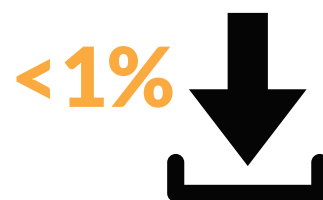
of visuals downloaded from Getty Images.[10]

QUESTIONS to consider
Trans community

- *Are you representing members of the trans community in your content?*

- *How are transgender people in your content being featured? Are they being featured within a community with friends, family, and/or romantic partners? Are they participating in activities of daily life, at work, at school, etc.?*

- *Are you focused on aspects of transgender people beyond the fact that they are transgender? Are you highlighting their personalities? Are you showing their hobbies or interests?*

- *Are you including transgender people with a variety of different sexual orientations? Heterosexual? Gay? Lesbian? Bisexual? Pansexual? Queer?*

- *Do the transgender people you feature represent a diversity of ages, races, and other intersections of identity?*

Section Three

Intersectional storytelling in LGBTQ+ communities

The dominant image of LGBTQ+ people in marketing and media remains young, white, affluent, and male. This negates the experiences of other LGBTQ+ people and creates bias within the community.

Defining intersectionality

Professor and lawyer, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality over 30 years ago to acknowledge the way in which our social categorizations create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. Let's look at some examples of how this works:

A queer woman of color with a disability may be marginalized or discriminated against on the basis of gender, sexual orientation and ability—all at once.

A transgender man with a larger body, may experience some privileges of being a man (although that privilege is conditional on others not knowing that he's trans), but at the same time he may be marginalized or discriminated against on the basis of being transgender as well as having a larger body type.

Intersectionality and discrimination

According to research conducted by NPR, there are even higher rates of discrimination experienced by LGBTQ+ people of color than their white counterparts, particularly when it comes to applying to jobs or interacting with the police.[11]

In addition, people with disabilities, and older people in particular, find they are excluded from LGBTQ+ imagery and, in turn, find they face increased bias both from outside and within the LGBTQ+ community.

1 in 3 people who experience discrimination due to their disability also experience discrimination based on their race or ethnicity.[12]

1 in 2 people who experience discrimination due to their disability also experience discrimination based on their age.[13]

QUESTIONS to consider
Intersectionality

- *Are you showing LGBTQ+ people of various races and ethnicities?*

- *When featuring LGBTQ+ couples, are you considering the race and ethnicity of the partners (are they predominantly single-race couples, interracial couples, etc.)?*

- *Are you relying on "tokenism" and just making a symbolic or minimum effort to depict race/ethnicity or are you humanizing and telling robust, authentic stories of Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC) who are also LGBTQ+?*

- *What about LGBTQ+ people over 40? Over 50? Over 60? Are older LGBTQ+ individuals being featured in a positive way?*

- *LGBTQ+ people come in all shapes and sizes. Are you selecting images that show people with a range of body types living full, active lives?*

- *Some LGBTQ+ people have disabilities. Are you showing LGBTQ+ people with disabilities at work? At play? Experiencing the whole range of life experiences?*

LGBTQ+ identities overlap or intersect with every other possible group in an infinite number of ways. To feature LGBTQ+ people authentically, this must be reflected in the images you choose to include in advertising and marketing.

LGBTQ+ lives deserve authentic representation.

The power of inclusive imagery is in its ability to portray the LGBTQ+ community as dynamic and diverse, and at the same time totally relatable. The more authentic an image feels, the more it will resonate and promote greater awareness, acceptance and understanding. Authenticity is key to building trust and believability, and crucial to representing all LGBTQ+ people with humanity and dignity.

Glossary of terms

This selection of key terms is designed to help you better understand some of the most common language used when discussing sexual orientation and gender. Terms have been divided into two sections, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, to help elaborate on these two complex and evolving areas.

Understanding the language of the community is the first step to authentically connecting with the diverse people within it.

LGBTQ+: Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning. The L, G, B, and Q are used to describe a person's sexual orientation, while the T refers to gender identity.

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation: An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same.

Gay: A person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to members of the same gender.

Lesbian: A woman who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to other women.

Bisexual: A person who has the capacity to form enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attractions to members of the same gender or to members of another gender. People may experience this attraction in differing ways and degrees over their lifetime.

Queer: An adjective used by some people, particularly younger people, whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual (e.g., queer person, queer woman). Typically, for those who identify as queer, the terms lesbian, gay, and bisexual are perceived to be too limiting and/or fraught with cultural connotations they feel don't apply to them. Some people may use queer, or more commonly genderqueer, to describe their gender identity and/or gender expression (see nonbinary and/or genderqueer below). Once considered a pejorative term, queer has been reclaimed by some LGBT people to describe themselves; however, it is not a universally accepted term even within the LGBT community. When Q is seen at the end of LGBT, it typically means queer and, less often, questioning.

Pansexual: Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to people of any gender, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree.

Coming out: A lifelong process of self-acceptance. People forge a LGBTQ identity first to themselves and then they may reveal it to others. Publicly sharing one's identity may or may not be part of coming out.

Out: A person who self-identifies as LGBTQ in their personal, public, and/or professional lives. For example: *Ricky Martin is an out pop star from Puerto Rico.* Preferred to *openly gay*.

Gender identity

Gender identity: One's innermost sense of one's self as a man or a woman. For some people, their gender identity does not fit neatly into one of those two choices (see nonbinary below). Unlike gender expression, gender identity is not visible to others. One's gender identity can be the same as or different from one's assigned sex at birth.

Gender expression: External manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, and/or body characteristics. Society identifies these cues as masculine and feminine, although what is considered masculine or feminine changes over time and varies by culture. Some people conform to these socially defined roles of masculine and feminine, while others do not. Violating gender expression roles does not make someone transgender.

Transgender: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans women are women, trans men are men, and nonbinary people have a gender identity that is something other than those two choices. Transgender people may have any type of gender expression. And since gender identity is different than sexual orientation, trans people can have any sexual orientation: straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

Nonbinary: An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Nonbinary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all nonbinary people do. Other terms that you might hear that fall under the nonbinary umbrella include: genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, and bigender.

Gender nonconforming: A term used to describe people whose gender expression is different from conventional expectations of masculinity and femininity. Please note that not all gender nonconforming people are transgender, nor are all transgender people gender nonconforming.

Transition: The process by which some people seek to more closely align their gender identity with their outward appearance. Some people socially transition by changing the way they dress, and/or using a new name and pronouns. Others may modify their bodies with hormone replacement therapy and/or surgeries.

Cisgender: A term used to describe a person who is not transgender. It is a synonym for non-transgender person. A cisgender person's gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Pronouns: Pronouns like he/him and she/her are gendered and when we use them to describe someone, we are gendering them. Trans men typically use he/him pronouns and trans women typically use she/her pronouns. Nonbinary people typically use the singular form of they/them as a way of asserting that their gender is not man or woman. Note: In other languages, nouns and verbs may also be gendered. In countries with gendered languages, nonbinary people are working to identify new ways to talk about being a nonbinary person.

Additional resources

GLAAD's Media Reference Guide—Transgender
Transgender style guide that includes terms to know and guidelines for proper name and pronoun usage.
https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender

Transgender FAQ
Learn more about trans people and the issues important to them.
https://www.glaad.org/transgender/transfaq

Tips for Allies of Trans People
Learn more about how to be an ally to trans people.
https://www.glaad.org/transgender/allies

Join the conversation.

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Footnotes
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5. Getty Images, Visual GPS, Spring 2021
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7. Getty Images, Visual GPS, Spring 2021
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9. Getty Images, Top 1 Million Searches YOY 2020 vs. 2019
10. Getty Images, Top 1 Million Downloads, 2020
11. NPR, "For LGBTQ+ People of Color, Discrimination Compounds," November 2017 (https://www.npr.org/2017/11/25/564887796/
for-lgbtq-people-of-color-discrimination-compounds)
12. Getty Images, Visual GPS, Summer 2020
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