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How to Make Your Content & Creative More Inclusive

In today's age of constant advertising, with dozens of different channels to consume content and near-constant interconnection, we're regularly shown images, videos, and more that are all trying to speak to us.

A big part of connecting with your audience is speaking to them on their level. And that means showing imagery that feels authentic.

As a content producer, a creative, or a marketer, you've likely put the concepts of diversity and inclusion at the forefront of your goals. After all, who wouldn't want their customer or their audience to feel included? But this concept isn't a box just to check, nor is it something that can be glossed over. Making sure your creative work is diverse can be tricky, and there are plenty of places for missteps.

In this resource, we're here to help you navigate our modern world, and show you how to make your content more diverse, more authentic, and ultimately more inclusive. We'll cover the different "lenses" through which your audience sees identity, we'll show you how to choose images and videos that help to authentically show those identities in your work, and ultimately how to do make D&I part of your brand's ethos, not just a problem for you to solve.

1307458540, kali9

1278976564, Nadzeya_Dzivakova

167929689, Olezzo

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1130750357, VectorMine

926230544, FG Trade

1332296947, SolStock

What Diversity Actually Means

Defining diversity when it comes to marketing and content projects is nuanced. While many might define diversity as "representing all races as much as possible", this is fairly reductive and actually misses the goal of inclusiveness. At the end of the day, having "diverse imagery" alone is totally missing the other pillars of this concept: celebrating different identities, understanding different cultures, and ultimately doing it all with authenticity.

Many marketers have opted to go with terms like "equity", "authenticity", and "inclusion" instead of labeling everything under "diversity". In fact, it's several of these concepts tied together that tends to make your content and your work feel much more resonant with your audience, which is made of a variety of different identities.

"For [iStock], 'Diversity and Inclusion' often means understanding that there are groups of people who have been historically underrepresented or misrepresented in visual mediums throughout our culture," says the Creative Insights Team at Getty Images.

> **"What we are driving towards is more authentic representations of people that have been previously left out."**

It's sometimes important to look at these segments of identities as "lenses", which we'll get into next.

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The 7 Lenses of Identity

When people think of D&I, they often think solely about showing people of different races and ethnicities, but people's identities are made up of so much more than just these particular social categories. In order to bring authenticity to visual storytelling, it's important to represent people as multidimensional as they are in real life. That's why **our Creative Insights Team at Getty Images and iStock partnered with Citibank** to create the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Toolkit. As brands and businesses prioritize diversity and inclusion in their visual communications, we want to ensure that marketers are doing so in an authentic way. The guidelines present seven key lenses of identity to be aware of when choosing inclusive visuals.

Race & Ethnicity

Disability

Gender

Bodies

Sexual Orientation

Religion

Age

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Race & Ethnicity

The Identity

While "race" is a social category without scientific basis, it often describes humans that share certain distinctive physical traits. On the other hand, ethnicity defines groups or classes according to certain common characteristics including racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural background. With so many aspects, it's clear to see why just identifying someone by the broad concept of race and ethnicity can be too limiting, and in many cases these identities can even overlap.

The Numbers

According to Pew Research and data pulled from the 2010 census, in less than a decade, the entire under-50 population will be majority non-white. More than 15% of the US population identifies as Hispanic or Latino, almost 13% identifies as Black or African American, and more than 5% identify as Asian. Those are big pieces of the population pie, and a lot of that demographic data translates in some way to your business's audience.

15%+
Latino

≈13%
Black

5%+
Asian

50%+
Non-White
in less than
a decade

The Takeaway

A person's ethnic background and racial identity are obviously hugely important, and representing those backgrounds authentically in your visuals and content can help your audience to feel seen and heard. But this is only one piece of the identity puzzle. Bringing in the following lenses is important when selecting imagery and writing about people.

1322147615,
Nadzeya_Dzivakova

Gender

iStock
1320336692, Drs Producoes

1300508970, staticnak1983

The Identity

What was previously considered a binary constant, a person's gender is actually a lot more nuanced than that. One aspect of someone's gender is their sex at birth—referring specifically to their physical body, chromosomes, genes, and hormones. There is also a person's gender expression—referring to their external appearance. These are often the same, but not always.

The Numbers

According to our **Visual GPS research**, women experience more bias than men and of the 57% of people who have been affected by bias, almost a third of them said this bias was on the basis of gender. Despite that, more than half of American consumers still believe people should accept that there are more than two genders. In short, there's a disconnect between what's often shown in advertising and a more progressive attitude towards gender identity felt by most consumers.

50%+
believe in
2+ genders

57%
have been
affected by bias

The Takeaway

Depicting men and women authentically is still a major part of showing gender diversity, but consideration should be paid to those who identify as non-binary, transgender, and other often underrepresented groups. Statistically a large part of your audience likely identifies this way, and keeping this audience as part of your equation is crucial.

Sexual Orientation

The Identity

Sexual Orientation refers to a person's inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. While the letters LGBQ+ in the acronym LGBTQ+ are related to sexual orientation, it's important to remember that the T (transgender) in the acronym refers to a gender identity, not a sexual orientation.

The Numbers

According to **Kantar's 2019 Monitor**, about 15% of the United States population fall under the description of LGBTQ+. However, less than 1% of popular visuals actually represent people with this identity authentically.

15%
LGBTQ+

<1%
visuals show
this identity

The Takeaway

The dichotomy of the stats above is striking, because it means that there's a potential for 15% of your audience to feel underrepresented. Being such an important lens of identity, ignoring this identity can alienate customers and put your brand further from who you're trying to reach.

Age

The Identity

Demographically speaking, age is one of the clearest cut traits to signify, but because the length of time someone has been alive affects their experiences socially, culturally, and economically, age identities are usually defined by generations. Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z are terms you've likely heard, and while plenty of members don't identify with the rhetoric about them, determining a person's personal view on their age identity is a big part of how they consume content.

The Numbers

Based on **Pew Research** the largest segment of the US population is age 25–54, with the median age being 38.5. This majority age range sits across several generational signifiers (Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials), and all of them feel very differently about that distinction. However, Baby Boomers are the generation that are most likely (nearly 72%) to feel discriminated against in communications.

38.5
Median Age

72%
of Baby Boomers most likely to feel discriminated against

The Takeaway

Remembering to authentically depict a wide range of ages is a clear way to make sure a wide selection of your audience feels represented. But, it's also key to not distinguish between generations with any sort of stereotypes or exaggerations. Age can contribute to a person's worldview, but it is not all-encompassing.

Disability

The Identity

Disability, as an identity, is one of the most difficult things to portray accurately in a creative context. That's because many disabilities aren't visible all the time. A disability can be described as a condition of the body or mind that makes it more difficult for that person to do certain activities or interact with the world around them. These can affect a person's vision, movement, thinking, remembering, learning, and mental health (and more). In general, it's recommended to use people-first language: refer to a person with a disability, not a disabled person.

The Numbers

According to the CDC, 61 million adults in the United States are living with some sort of disability. However, according to Deloitte Heat, more than 50% of people with disabilities say they are frustrated by brands that treat people like them as an afterthought.

61MM
Live with
Disability

50%+
of people with
disabilities are
frustrated by brands

The Takeaway

With millions of Americans living with a disability, and more than half of them dissatisfied with their representation in advertising and media, there's a huge opportunity for your brand to incorporate people with disabilities into your content. But keeping intersectionality in mind (i.e. a person with a disability who is also LGBTQ+), and ensuring that visuals depict people with disability in a natural, human way is key to keeping your audience included.

1309428722, Valeria Blanc

Bodies

1124417335, boggy22

1326349875, Igor Alecsander

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The Identity

A person's body type incorporates all aspects of a person's physical appearance, but you may be more familiar with this identity referring to someone's own picture of their physical appearance—their body image.

The Numbers

After conducting research as part of our **Visual GPS survey**, we found that 40% of respondents experience discrimination as it relates to their body shape, size, or type. These same people feel it's hugely important that body positivity is at the forefront of campaigns and media. We also found that around 30% of people want to see imagery that is natural and not retouched—letting a model's body type show through naturally.

40%
feel body discrimination

30%
want to see unretouched imagery

The Takeaway

What's key with choosing imagery as it relates to body type is to capture what feels real. Not everyone is tall and skinny, nor is everyone perfectly symmetrical. Ensuring that an image shows off the realness of the subjects—without overt post-production or retouching—can signal to your audience that you're embracing real people.

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Religion

The Identity

Religion itself is defined as a set of beliefs that concern the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe. But how religion plays into visuals is a different thing, entirely. While some religious customs affect how people dress and behave, it isn't always something that's easy to depict visually.

The Numbers

According to Pew Research, less than half of the American population is represented by White Christians. That means that more people make up a variety of other groups, such as Jewish, Muslim, or even those who don't associate with a specific religious identity. This plays into a person's age and generation, too with 40% of Millennials saying they aren't affiliated with a religion, but only 17% of Baby Boomers saying the same thing.

‹ half
of population
is White Christian

40%
of Millennials
are unaffiliated

The Takeaway

Like other identities, religion is not a one-dimensional attribute, and depicting different faiths is most effective when done alongside race, age, and more. In short, it's important to look at a person's religion (or a lack of affiliation with religion) as part of the larger picture.

Choosing imagery

Now that you've outlined the largest lenses through which people may view their identities, it's important to know how to put that into practice when choosing imagery. When browsing visual collections and websites like iStock, it can be tempting to use search terms like "diverse people" or "multi denominational crowd". But this will often yield overly staged results, and images that focus on only one lens of identity. Instead, keep your subject matter in mind. Are you working on an article about nurses and healthcare workers? Start with those search terms, and use filters to narrow down what you're looking for—but keep an eye on representation and authenticity in the images your search returns to you (using the takeaways from the lenses above).

It's important to consider who is in the picture, but we also need to consider other factors.

> **Where are they?**
> **What are they doing?**
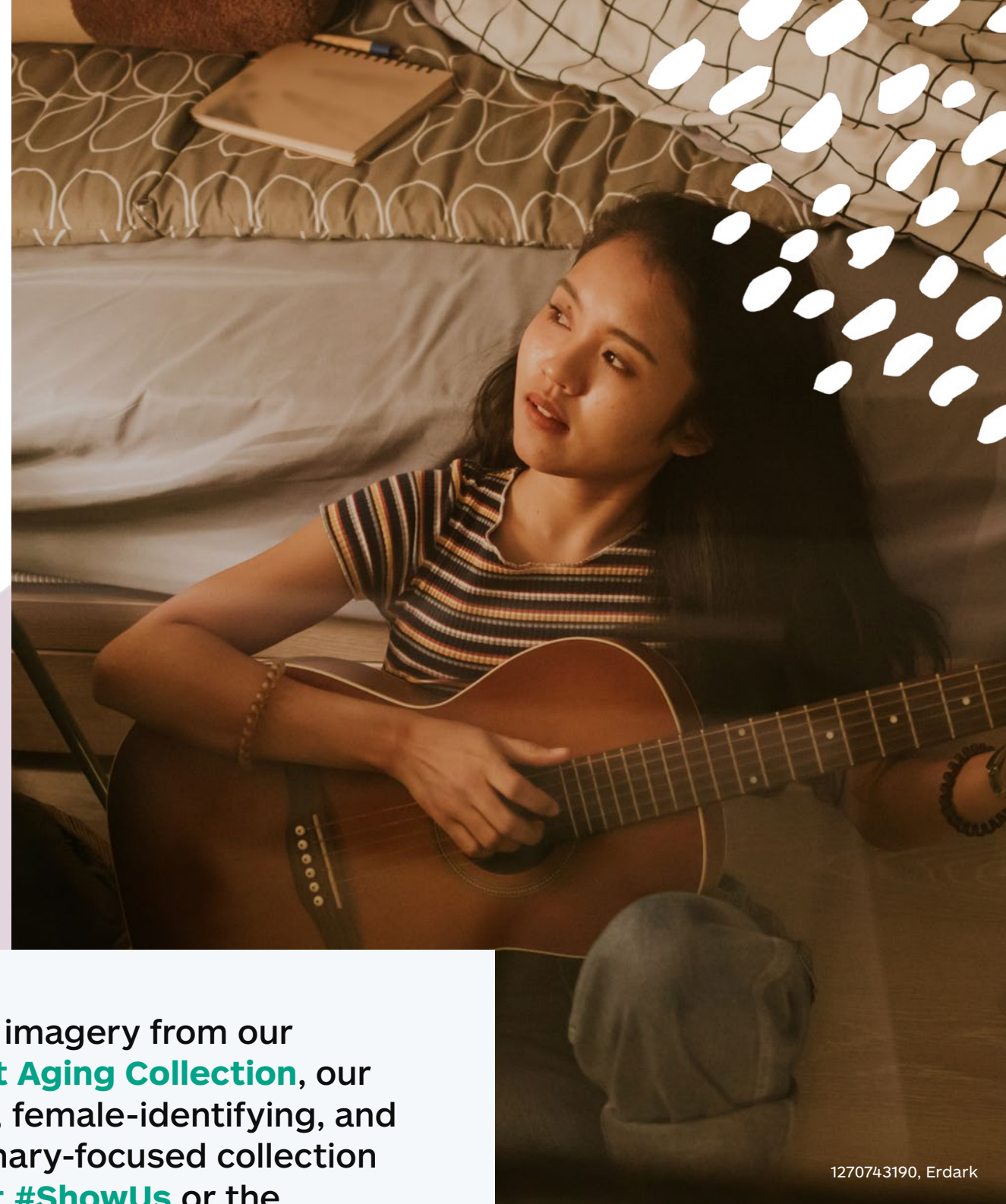> **What emotions are they showing?**

These kinds of questions will help guide you in determining whether that person is acting authentically, or if the picture is being staged. So, while race is one lens to consider when choosing diverse imagery, also focus on the age of the subjects, their body types, or even whether they have a disability or not. If the emotion of the image feels natural and fits your project, it's easy for inclusiveness to follow.

If you're looking for unique takes on some of these lenses, check out iStock's curated collections that focus on these different identities.
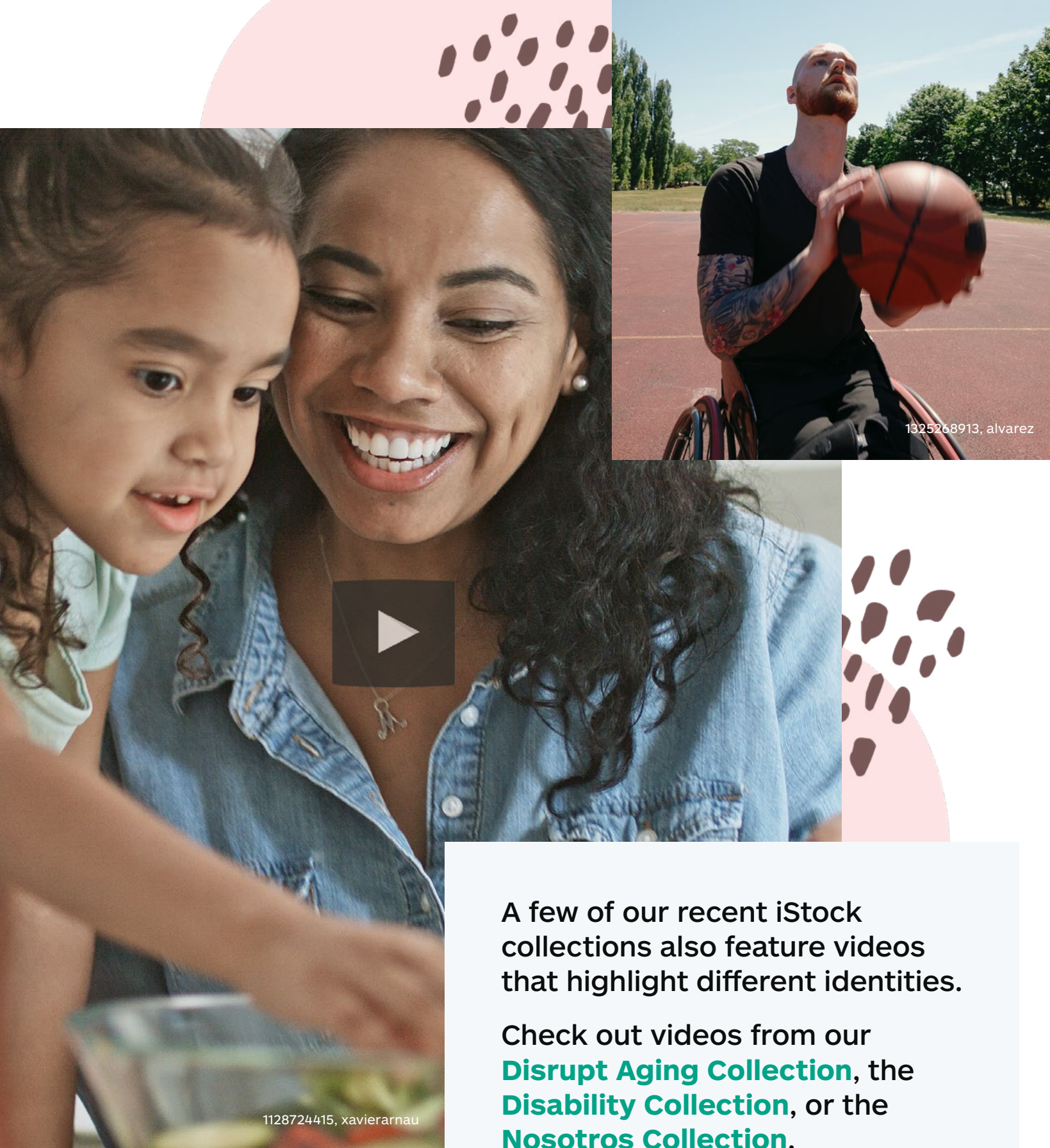
Search imagery from our **Disrupt Aging Collection**, our female, female-identifying, and non-binary-focused collection **Project #ShowUs** or the **Disability Collection**.

All of these put one lens at the forefront, but our team also ensures that intersectionality and other lenses are accounted for in each collection.

1270743190, Erdark

iStock

1325268913, alvarez

1128724415, xavierarnau

A few of our recent iStock collections also feature videos that highlight different identities.

Check out videos from our **Disrupt Aging Collection**, the **Disability Collection**, or the **Nosotros Collection**.

How choosing video can be different

While many of the principles above that relate specifically to imagery can be carried over to using video in your work, distinguishing between the two mediums is also crucial. While photos capture a finite moment in time and a small slice of a scene, videos depict a more three-dimensional moment. Therefore, you aren't just seeing a pose and a person's likeness—you're seeing how that subject is behaving in real time.

As a result, factoring behavior into that person's identity becomes more nuanced. Is a person with a disability playing basketball? Be sure that the video is showing off how they would naturally shoot or pass the ball. Is there a model in a studio pretending to give a speech?

Make sure that that subject looks and feels like they are comfortable in front of that camera.

While we all know how staged and forced some stock photos can feel, if a video set has subjects behaving unnaturally, it's even more obvious.

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Diversity & inclusion when you're writing

A big part of creative inclusiveness centers on the visuals that go with that creative, but don't discount the power of the written and spoken word. When writing content and copy for your projects, be cognizant of your word choice.

Another consideration when it comes to word choice is whether your writing is appearing on the page or as a voiceover or performance in a video. If you're hiring talent to read a script (whether on-camera or not), that's a whole new dimension of identity. Are you looking for an accent? If so, it's best to hire someone who naturally has that accent, rather than someone performing an accent.

Are you writing your script with a specific gender in mind?

If so, is that actually serving the process, or is a more gender-agnostic focus a better approach? These sorts of questions can help to determine whether you're connecting with your whole audience in your writing, or not.

1328008525, Koh Sze Kiat

1269766791, pabst_ell

1026260612, adamkaz
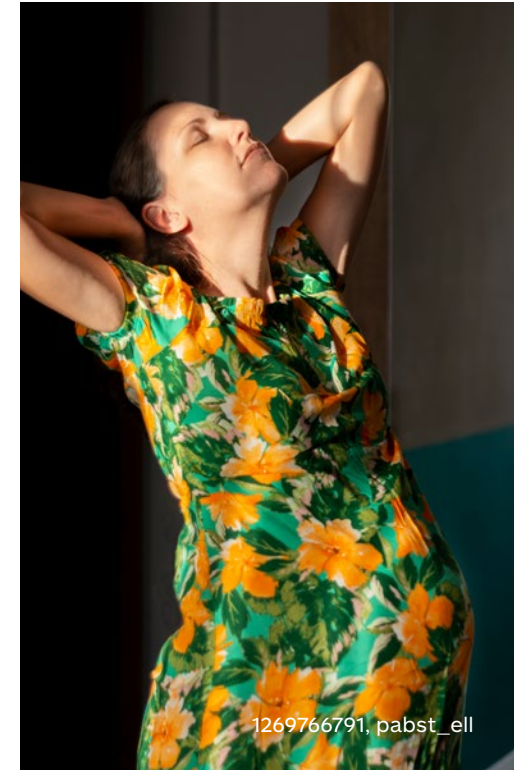
Continuing to evolve your brand and your strategy

As a closing point to diversity and inclusion, brands should understand that nothing is truly set in stone, and evolving your approach to inclusive content is the way to really do it well. Choosing inclusive imagery should be a regular practice, not a reactive, standalone thing. It's a learning process and you can get better at it.

A good way to look at it is from the lens of your brand's identity. If you're working on a project, and it feels like the images you're choosing or the concepts that relate to diversity feel "forced" or disingenuous, then it's probably better to go a different direction. However, if you're confident that the work you're putting out in the world is authentic, but your audience feels like it's not—learn from those moments. Engage with your audience, adjust your approach with future projects, and evolve your brand.

Here at iStock, our commitment to diversity and inclusion in visual communications is ongoing.

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