

## Widening the Lens on Transgender Stories

Jun 30, 2021 | Rebecca Rom-Frank

There is now more transgender representation in the mainstream media than ever before, but there's still much work to be done. When Elliot Page [came out as transgender](#) last December, he joined the ranks of other highly visible transgender actors such as Laverne Cox, Hari Nef, and Hunter Schafer, all of whom have recently starred in films or television series, including many with transgender storylines. From *Paris is Burning* to *Euphoria*, the discrimination that this community suffers is often part of transgender storylines in the media. Our [Visual GPS](#) research found that consumers are far more likely to see transgender people portrayed as victims of violence than in an everyday setting, with their families, or even experiencing joy. Increased representation alone isn't enough—it's important for people to see a wider variety of positive visual stories featuring transgender individuals, and brands can help fill that gap.

With increased visibility in the media and [slow-but-steady progress](#) in Washington, DC, the real barrier to seeing more transgender representation in advertising seems to be less that American culture is not accepting, and more that brands are afraid of getting it wrong. According to [The Visibility Project](#), 81% of advertisers and 41% of agencies worry that an inauthentic depiction of LGBTQ+ people and scenarios would lead to a larger *backlash* than not featuring them in advertising at all—even though 68% of non-LGBTQ+ consumers say that they feel better about buying from companies that feature LGBTQ+ people in ads. At Getty Images, customer searches for “trans” increased +129% this past year; yet, despite the intention, transgender people only appeared in less than 1% of our top-downloaded content.

Clearly, more guidance is needed in order to increase transgender visibility in advertising. That's why we've partnered with [GLAAD](#) to create guidelines for our own media creators to create a [collection of authentic and inclusive visuals](#) of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as [guidelines for our customers](#) on how to choose the right content. It may technically be the end of Pride Month, but that's all the better—our Visual GPS research found that consumers expects brands' commitments to diverse and inclusive visuals to be ongoing. So, this July is the perfect time to start including the transgender community in visual communications across all topics, all year round. Here are three takeaways, based on our guidelines, for authentically representing transgender people in visuals.

## **Be conscious of intersectionality**

“Intersectionality” refers to the interconnected nature of social categories such as race, class, and gender, which are often regarded as creating overlapping systems of discrimination or disadvantage. Our fresh wave of Visual GPS research revealed that 94% of consumers who experience bias related to their gender or gender identity also experience another type of bias, whether that’s related to their sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, or body size or type.

Think about how, with the wave of Black Lives Matter uprisings last June, a wave of Black Trans Lives Matter marches followed close behind; this year, a demonstration in support of Black trans youth in New York City [attracted thousands](#). Being inclusive of transgender people in visual stories also means being conscious of the other intersecting identity factors that this community possesses, such as race, ethnicity, age, body size, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and more.

## **Show transgender individuals as members of communities, families, and friendships**

Authentic representation means showing more than just someone’s identity. In the past, transgender people have often been shown isolated or ostracized from society. Therefore, it’s very important to show transgender individuals as part of a community. Look for visuals that show transgender individuals as part of communities, at home or out with family, and in friendships—both with other LGBTQ+ people, and without.

Remember that *trans* is a gender identity, so transgender people can have a range of sexual orientations—gay, lesbian, queer, heterosexual, or pansexual. Consider this when choosing visuals that show transgender individuals as part of romantic couples, as well.

## **Broaden the scope of which stories are told**

Our Visual GPS research shows that consumers are most likely to see images of LGBTQ+ carrying a rainbow or transgender flag, marching or protesting, or at parties or Pride parades. When we analyzed the most popular content at Getty Images, we found that our own customers tend to gravitate towards these types of images to represent the transgender community, as well.

Visuals showing transgender individuals in everyday scenarios—at work, at school, playing sports, or engaging in various other hobbies—are seldom seen. Elevate the everyday stories of transgender individuals by choosing visuals that broaden the scope of which aspects of their lives are seen and thereby normalized in the visual culture at large.