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Guidelines for
Women & Girls in Sport

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Closing the Visibility Gap

Are you giving visibility and a voice to women's sport?

Throughout history, female athletes have had to fight for visibility in sport. Relentlessly breaking through gender barriers, activism continues to sit at the heart of women's sport. Today's female athletes are leading on a more equitable and inclusive culture in sport, driving conversations on mental health, gender pay equality, parenthood, body empowerment, LGBTQi inclusion and many social issues. Yet, the visibility gap remains.

Bringing transformative equity forward requires work on many fronts to close the visibility gap. We believe media companies, sports rights holders and brands can change the perceptions of women sport by changing the visuals they use. By choosing to shine a more inclusive and intersectional lens on women and girls in sport, together we can close the visibility gap with equity.

Backed by Getty Images VisualGPS insights, we have put together these practical guidelines to help creatives, editors, art directors, marketers to create and select visual content for unbiased, inclusive visual storytelling on women and girls in sport.



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Inclusive Lens

People's perceptions of what is possible in sport is shaped by who they are and what they want to see. Taking intersectionality into consideration is key because 68% of sports fans now believe sports organisations and brands should do more to promote women in sport and top visual preferences are seeing women and girls of all age groups, body types and abilities engaging in sport. Women and girls are not one homogenous group and there is not 'one' look to showing a woman in sport. Each individual has different layers of identity and to move representation meaningfully forward, an inclusive lens is needed.



Points to consider: Inclusive Lens

Gender:

Are you providing an equitable range of options of different moments for women and girls participating at all levels in sport?

What sports are you showing women and girls participating in and who is shooting this sport?

Are you showing female support staff and non-binary staff? Coaches, trainers, medical staff, organisational staff, umpires etc.

Are you showing women and girl sport fans from all backgrounds supporting stereotypically male sports like combat or motorsports?

Are you checking if you are 'othering' trans or non-binary athletes participants, staff or fans by focusing on certain aspects of their physical appearance? Are you representing more than their trans-identity, by showing skill and genuine passion for their sport?





Points to consider: Inclusive Lens

Age:

Are you focusing on showing relatable visuals of key demographics where research shows an aging-out in sport i.e. puberty, menopause? Are you showing relatable visuals of pre-teen, teenage girls and 45+ women to build self-esteem and drive participation?

Are you showing mixed age groups of women and girls engaging in a variety of sports? Are you showing the power of sport in bringing generations together?

Are you representing older female athletes and 45+ women in sport? Are you showing different body types, skin tones, hair textures, ethnicities and abilities?

Are you showing only certain sports for 45+ women? Are you equating older age with declining physical prowess?

Are you showing the emotional rewards for 45+ women and teen girls of engaging in sport as athletes, participants, staff and fans?

Points to consider: Inclusive Lens

Ability:

Are you showing women and girls with disabilities in sport?

Does your focal point end up being the disability rather than the whole experience of playing or enjoying sport?

What range of sports are you showing women and girls with disabilities participating in or supporting?

Are you showing your female athlete with disabilities in isolation or are you fully representing how they fit within a larger team?

According to Getty Images VisualGPS research, 73% of fans say it is important to give athletes with disabilities the same coverage as their able-bodied counterparts.





Points to consider: Inclusive Lens

Culture:

Are you representing women from diverse cultures when visualising ownership, leadership, coaching and employee base?

Are you moving representation beyond tokenisation by showing true lifestyles of female athletes, women and girls from different cultures as they engage in sport?

Are you accounting for regional and religious differences in sports attire, styling, hair, modesty concerns etc.?

Sexuality:

Are you visualising inclusive representation of LGBTQ+ athletes, participants, sport support staff, coaches, fans?

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Body Empowerment

Closing the visibility gap on different body shapes, sizes and abilities in women's sport is crucial, not only for participation but also for performance and life long care. For too long, the female anatomy has been missing from sports science research with women's physical bodies being unsupported in sport e.g. menstruation, pregnancy, motherhood, concussion on female bodies, poorly designed equipment based on the male body. Limiting beauty standards for female athletes are also being upended. 7 in 10 fans now prefer to see female athletes portrayed in an authentic way that focuses on their skill and athleticism rather than their beauty, glamour or sex appeal.



Points to consider: **Body Empowerment**

Are you inclusive of all body types, shapes and abilities?

Are you selecting primary subjects based on the appeal of their physical appearance? Are you preferencing a specific body type that is lean and strong, yet still soft and 'womanly'? Are you empowering participation by showing real bodies?

How are you fully representing the skill and athleticism

of female athletes in their particular sport? Do you show their full physicality in your action shots? Do you show them in the moment of action rather than before or after the action?

Are you intentionally addressing issues of colourism?

Are you reflecting different ethnicities, skin shades and complexions, different hair styles and textures?

Are you intentionally addressing the aging out of sports

by showing different body shapes, sizes and abilities of older women proactively engaging in sport?





Points to consider: **Body Empowerment**

Do your visuals show the rougher side of sport?

Do you avoid showing grime, dirt, sweat and blood?

How are you representing parenthood in female sport?

Are you showing pregnant athletes? Female athletes as parents?
Parents supporting younger athletes?

Are you normalising the emotional and physical challenges

of puberty and sport? Or perimenopause and menopause and sport? Are you showing support from coaches, family or teammates?

How much retouching are you are using?

Are you considering how comfortable a female athlete is with having their images retouched? Are you considering how unretouched visuals of real bodies can be more relatable and inspirational to women and girls to drive participation in sport?

Mental Health

Fans want an honest conversation on mental health in sports:

A traditional view of athletes often glorifies their determination and leaves no room for human weakness. But female athletes like Simone Biles and Naomi Osaka are turning vulnerability into strength by stepping out of competition to protect their mental health. 68% of consumers believe more athletes and sports leagues should talk about mental health. The public is now looking to sports icons to be leaders in the cultural discussion around mental health.



Points to consider: Mental Health

Are you challenging social stigmas in women's sport

by doing what you can to normalise taboos around mental health to show more leadership and inclusion?

Are you showing female athletes, women and girls receiving support

from coaching staff, team members, friends, family or competitors?

Are you empowering others by showing vulnerability as strength?

Have you considered how the camera angle and composition can reframe vulnerability to be empowering? Are you showing female athletes setting mental health boundaries?

Are you inspiring by showing candid moments of the positive impacts

that sport has on women and girls' mental health to drive participation?

Are you showing how sport creates community and connection for all

women and girls as supportive fans, participants, elite athletes etc.?





Emotions

For women and girls in sport, too often gender stereotypes of certain emotions associated with certain sports limits seeing the full range of emotions that can be experienced when participating in sports. Fans agree that athletes should be allowed to fully express their identity when participating in sport. Visuals that show all sides of female athletes' character, emotions and sports journey have the power to move wider audiences through more authentic and emotive visuals.

Points to consider:

Emotions

How often do you associate certain emotions with certain sports?

Are you only portraying female boxers as angry? Gymnasts as happy and charming?

Have you allowed female athletes, women and girls to express

the full range of emotions that can be experienced when playing sports? Are they frustrated, fierce, focused, vulnerable, determined, competitive?

Are you creating inclusive and collaborative environments

to empower female athletes to bring their authentic selves on their terms to shoots? Are you clearly communicating the objective of each shot to build trust?

Are you showing female athletes and women in sport more holistically?

Are you showing all sides of their character and ability?

How are you showing achievement or success in sports

that women and girls are participating in?



Recommendations

- Focus on diversity in age, ethnicity, ability and realistic body shapes for the sport being visualised
- Females should look action-oriented, not passive
- Males should be collaborative and supportive
- Action must be believable
- Show technical aspects to demonstrate the skill of the sport
- Show emotions—and include the whole range of emotions in addition to joy: anger, disappointment, determination, frustration, love, pain, happiness
- Sweat, grit and blood are all okay, where appropriate
- Remember to show female support staff



Sports

Extreme sports:

Car racing, motorcycle racing, skydivers, paragliders, downhill and off-road cycling, road bike racing, BMX, powerboating

Team sports:

Soccer, basketball, rugby, field hockey, cricket, baseball, softball, roller derby, American football, dodgeball, netball, competitive cheerleading

Water sports:

Swimming, diving, surfing, canoeing, sailing, rowing, water polo, windsurfing, water skiing

Winter sports:

Skiing, snowboarding, cross country skiing, ice hockey, skating, bobsleigh, curling, luge, speed skating

Racquet sports:

Tennis, lacrosse, badminton, squash, table tennis, pickleball

Precision sports:

Golf, archery, bowling, darts, shooting, snooker or pool

Track and field sports:

Sprinters, shot put, javelin, high jump, long jump, pole vault, hurdles, steeplechase, middle distance, long distance, relay, hammer throw, discus, marathon runners, extreme runners, obstacle courses, heptathlon, triathlon, speed walking

Strength and agility sports:

Gymnastics, trampolining, weightlifting, Crossfit-style competition, horse racing, show jumping, climbing and mountaineering, parkour, slacklining

Combat sports:

Fencing, wrestling, boxing, martial arts, UFC/MMA

