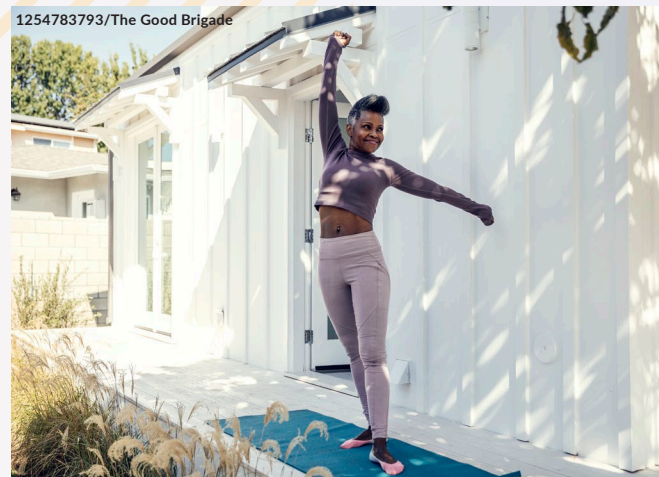




# A NEW ERA IN SPORTS

The Demand for Intersectional Gender Representation for Women and Girls





**Change the image,  
change the perception.**

Getty Images is the world's foremost visual experts—capturing, creating and preserving content to elevate visual communications everywhere. By identifying cultural shifts, spearheading trends, and powering the creative economy, we fuel visual storytelling worldwide.

Visuals are a powerful tool in upholding ideas for women and girls in sports. They can define what is aspirational, who can participate, inspire, lead, and win. They can also showcase accomplishment in all its forms. Inclusive visual storytelling can be a powerful force for change. From creating more opportunities for female athletes to moving away from stereotypes by focusing on skill and athletic ability – we can reimagine a new world for female sports on and off the field and across all forms of media.

### **What This Report Entails**



The State of Visual Representation: Women and Girls in Sports



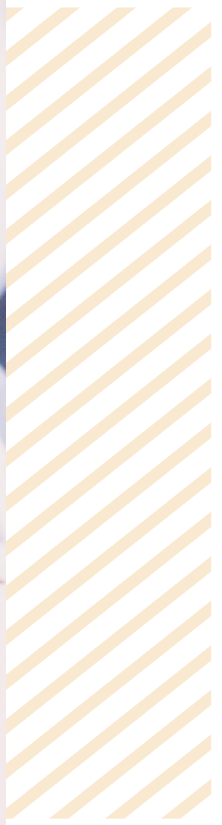
The Importance of an Intersectional Lens on Sports Representation



The Consumer Demand for Equity and Change



How Brands can Make an Impact



1367790917/Dedy Andrianto

## ***The Science Behind Visual Communication***

For the last 27 years, Getty Images has been examining societal mores based on the images portrayed in media, sports, and entertainment. We're committed to changing the conversation around diversity, inclusion, and equality by changing visual representation.

### **What is Title IX**

Getty Images and the Women's Sports Foundation partnered to explore the visibility gap for girls and women in sports. In the fifty years since the enactment of Title IX, the civil rights law passed in 1972 that revolutionized educational athletic programs by barring discrimination based on sex, significant strides have been made in representing women in sports. But, there is still work to be done.

Getty Images recognizes the significant anniversary in women's sports, equal rights, and U.S. history with a research project exploring representation of girls and women in sports. From our unique perspective as the world's leader in visual communication, and through our proprietary VisualGPS insights data and reporting, Getty Images conducted research exploring the current state of visual representation of gender in sports. The resulting White Paper reinforces the importance of an intersectional lens on sports representation and offers actionable insight on how brands can promote more authentic and inclusive gender representation in sports for current athletes and future generations.

### **Paradigm Shifting Progress in the United States**

Over the last several decades, we have witnessed real progress in gender equity and representation

across a broad spectrum of arenas: media and entertainment, education, workplace dynamics, political agendas, science and medicine, technology, and sports to name but a few.

Globally, the U.S. leads the way in elite competitive sports with state-of-the-art stadiums, networks of university-based sports and athletic training programs, and an Olympic delegation known for its top medal count. However, these gains still largely benefit and celebrate male competitors. For women and girls in sport, equal access to resources and opportunities has not been a given.

When Title IX was passed 50 years ago, it helped unlock access to educational and athletic opportunities paving the way for inroads into historically male-dominated professions.

Female high school athletes participating on varsity teams<sup>1</sup>



Percentage of women athletes competing on college teams<sup>2</sup>

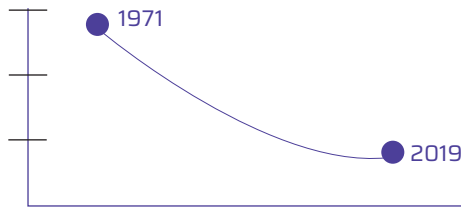


## The Change We Still Need

Access to opportunities for women and girls in sports at every level have risen significantly. Yet, disparities remain:

86%

of all three NCAA divisions offered disproportionately higher rates of athletic opportunities to male athletes compared to their enrollment<sup>3</sup>



There's been a precipitous decline in the number of collegiate female head coaches in NCAA women's sports (41% in 2020-2021 vs. 90% in 1971-1972)<sup>5</sup>

32%

of girls report that sometimes boys make fun of them or make them feel uncomfortable when they practice sports<sup>4</sup>

Only 11% of NCAA female student-athletes are Black versus the 68% of female student-athletes who are white<sup>6</sup>



1170970800/Mathieu Young



The equality and equity gap also contributes to a major visibility gap in all forms of media from advertising and television to news/sports analysis and more:



Only 5.4% of all televised media coverage is dedicated to women's sports<sup>7</sup>



Female athletes make up only 3% of visuals selected by media organizations<sup>8</sup>

Media organizations are

33X

more likely to tell stories of male athletes vs. female athletes<sup>9</sup>



1253519684/Marko Geber



1384835386/Dogan Kutukcu



1024842922/Thomas Barwick

## The State of Visual Representation: Women and Girls in Sports

A look at the most popular visuals used by brands and advertisers across Getty Images

### Is there equal gender representation in sports visuals?

Women outnumber men in most countries around the world, apart from China and India, the two most populous countries.<sup>10</sup> Women are also depicted in more visuals than men:

30%

more women appeared in Getty Images most popular visuals worldwide in 2021

Among the most popular sports visuals used by brands and advertisers the gender gap closes significantly. There are

30%

more men than women in popular sports visuals

For children the underrepresentation gap is even higher with

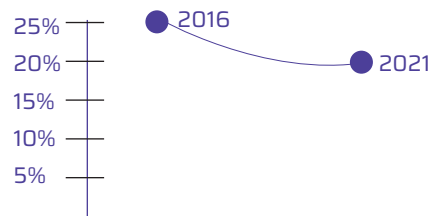
30%

more boys in popular sports visuals than girls

### How are women depicted when playing sports, competitively and leisurely?

Skills, athleticism, and competition take a back seat in visuals of women playing sports.

Action-oriented editorial visuals that show the skill of female athletes is declining despite fans visual preference for physical ability.



Since January 2021, less than 1 in 5 editorial visuals show female athletes in action moments, a decline from over 1 in 4 in 2016

In creative visuals popular with brands and advertisers, men are 3x more likely to be shown playing a team sport than women.



For children, the disparity is slightly less (2x more boys than girls), but is still a factor.

When women and girls are shown playing sports, women are

**2.5x** less likely to be shown in competition compared to their male counterparts.

**4x** less likely to be shown scoring (across all types of sports).

**2x** less likely to be shown winning a game, match or tournament.

Women are also seen in a higher number of portraits than men (48% more) within sports contexts. Portraiture can be moving and powerful and is not inherently reductive, but it can render the person as one dimensional. For female athletes, an overreliance on portraiture means that they are not seen in action and miss out on depictions of their dynamism, skill, and passion for the sports they play.



## Which sports are women and girls most frequently depicted playing?



**3x as many men** are depicted playing **soccer and golf** than women.

**3.5x as many male basketball players** are shown than female basketball players.

In soccer, the most popular type of sport for youth players in visuals, there are **2x more boys shown playing soccer than girls.**

Though not explicitly related to competitive sports, it's also important to note that women are more frequently depicted doing exercise (37% more than men) in popular visuals of general sport activity. This is an indicator of a cultural tendency toward perpetuating body consciousness rather than body positivity. Research from Getty Images proprietary VisualGPS research confirms that women experience bias or discrimination based on their body size or type.





## The Importance of an Intersectional Lens in Sports Representation

**Intersectionality defined:** The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.<sup>11</sup>

Participation and access to equal opportunity in sports is highly dependent on an athlete's identity. Girls and women of color who play sports often experience discrimination on two axes of identity: racism and sexism. Transgender and gender nonconforming athletes experience transphobia alongside sexism. Disabled athletes encounter ableism and sexism. Discrimination compounds when athletes hold many identities at once.

There is a public demand for inclusion in sports:

79%

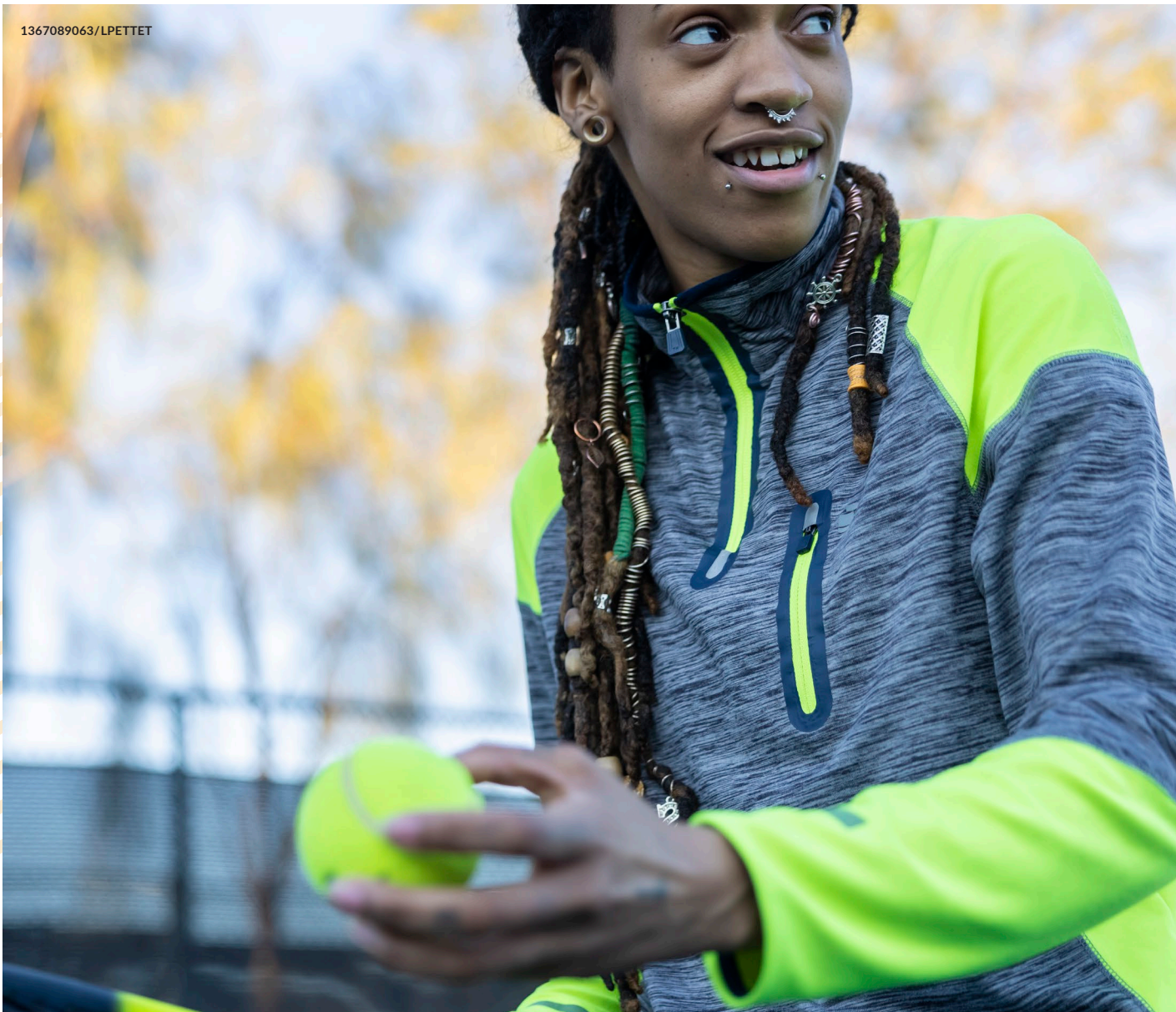
agree with the statement 'Sports should be accessible to everyone'<sup>12</sup>

56%

believe that 'Sports organizations should focus on creating an atmosphere of inclusivity'<sup>13</sup>

In this section, Getty Images looks at key intersections of identity with gender, primarily focusing on the United States given the uniqueness of the cultural and political landscape in the country.

1367089063/LPETTET



# Athletes of Color

## Sports & Representation Insights

Racial clustering – or the gathering of various populations based on ethnicity – has created barriers for women and girls of color in sports in the United States. It can be attributed to economic inequalities and institutional disadvantages that exist in many communities of color and limited resource school districts.

Over 40 percent of the nation’s high schools have either heavily white (white enrollment 90%) or heavily minority (white enrollment <10%).

Far fewer athletic opportunities are available to students in heavily minority schools compared to heavily white schools.



In a typical heavily minority school, there are only 25 spots available on sports teams for every 100 students.



In a typical heavily white school, there are 58 spots available on sports teams for every 100 students.<sup>14</sup>

Disparities carry over to the college level, where white women represent the largest population of women athletes in NCAA Divisions I, II, and III conferences combined with 68 percent.<sup>15</sup>

Black women represent **11%**

Latinas represent **6%**

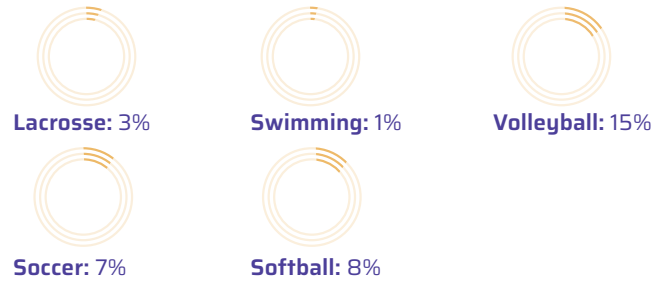
Women identifying with two or more races represent **5%**

Asian women represent **2%**

American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander women represent **0.5%**

Black women’s participation in sports has been historically limited to track & field and women’s basketball due to limited access to resources and being unjustly deemed unfit to

participate in “country club” sports given their homes of origin alongside their race. As a result, they are often underrepresented in many Division I sports including:<sup>16</sup>



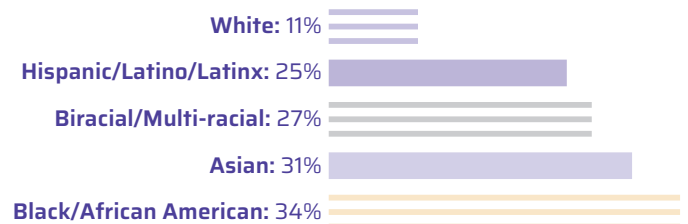
The disparity in sports for Black women and other women of color reflects the broader systemic issues of racism within this country. According to Getty Images VisualGPS research, racial and ethnic bias is slightly higher in the U.S. compared to the rest of the world.<sup>17</sup>

Percent of those who experience bias based on race/ethnicity:

Global average: **15%**      US: **18%**

We have found that when taken together, women of color experience forms of discrimination at the intersection of gender and race. People often see them as too emotional and not as smart. Even if indirectly, this sort of stereotyping can have an impact on the experiences of women of color across industries, occupations, and interests, including sports.

People of color report experiencing higher rates of discrimination due to their race or ethnicity than white people. Black and Asian respondents experience the highest rates of discrimination.





“Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other girls and women of color participate in sport at lower levels, face greater barriers to participation, and are historically excluded in sport leadership.”

Women's Sports Foundation

### Race & Ethnicity in Sports Visuals

Disparities and discrimination in everyday life, including sports, often shows up in popular visuals focused on women of color.

- Representations of women of color (especially Black and Asian women) playing sports have risen to 40% in popular sports visuals, but white women are represented most frequently.

Latinx women: **9%**  
(18% of the U.S. population)

Pacific Islander women: **0.93%**  
(0.7% of the U.S. population)<sup>18</sup>

- When depicted in sports visuals, most women of color encounter similar levels of exclusion and stereotyping as white women. They are less likely than men to be shown with a focus on skill, competition, and athleticism overall.



1083670434/Nick Davic



631125037/Klaus Vedfelt



1184166432/Trevor Williams



1354019574 /Johner Images



173160730/MoMo Productions

## Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Athletes

### Sports & Representation Insights

Most people are strong supporters of fluidity in gender expression, identity, and freedom from restrictive gender roles:<sup>19</sup>

81%

of Americans believe that people should be free to express their gender through clothing, hairstyles, mannerisms, etc.

72%

believe that society should not try to enforce conformity to traditional gender roles.

68%

believe that people should be free to self-identify their gender.

Despite public support of the trans and broader LGBTQ+ community, many state legislatures in the United States are actively working to restrict transgender rights, including rights to participate in sports. Transgender athletes face bans from girls' sports in 10 U.S. States.<sup>20</sup>

### Gender Diversity in Sports Visuals

There is very little representation of transgender, nonbinary, or other gender nonconforming athletes. Only 2 out of thousands of popular sports visuals focus on this community, rendering the data inadequate to look at meaningful visual representation of this group in sports. Given the overwhelming push to keep trans athletes from competing in spaces that align with their gender identity, there is a need to bring more visibility to this community across all areas of visual storytelling.



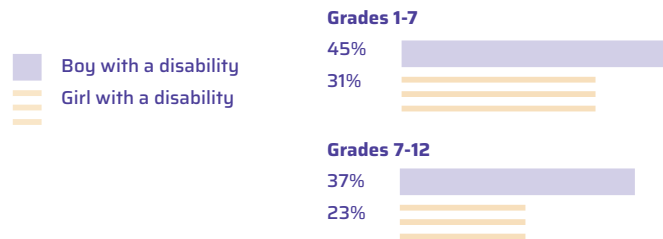


## Athletes with Disabilities

### Sports & Representation Insights

- More than 60 million adults in the U.S. live with some sort of disability.<sup>21</sup> And there are nearly 7 million students with disabilities attending the nation's public schools.<sup>22</sup>
- According to Getty Images VisualGPS insights, 94% of consumers believe that people with disabilities should be given equal opportunities.<sup>23</sup>
- In a report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office in 2010, boys with disabilities consistently participate in sport at higher rates than girls with disabilities:<sup>24</sup>

Among athletes with disabilities participating on school or community-based sports teams<sup>25</sup>



### Disability in Sports Visuals

There is little representation of people with disabilities playing sports of any kind. Only 0.71% of popular sports visuals include a person with a disability. That said, what is seen in visuals featuring people with disabilities provides an indication on the direction needed to improve the number and authenticity of representation:

- Athleticism and competition are prominent for athletes with disabilities (61% of visuals), especially for women and girls (43%).
- White women and girls with disabilities are represented in more than half of visuals, though Native Americans and Black Americans have the highest prevalence of disability according to the CDC.
- The types of disabilities depicted in sports visuals focus overwhelmingly on physical disability, especially people in wheelchairs.

**People with disabilities are often referred to as the forgotten “D” in diversity and inclusion. It’s important to elevate and celebrate those with disabilities along with other intersections of identity when centering women and girls in sports in visual storytelling.**



Female athletes with disabilities continue to receive fewer opportunities to pursue their athletic dreams. And access to sport opportunities varies greatly based on economic status and location (urban, suburban, or rural).

Women’s Sports Foundation



1073000864/KOLOsteek



915547638/Joos Mind

## The Consumer Demand for Equity and Change

Progress remains uneven for female athletes and inequities persist across many aspects and levels of sport. Recent findings from the Women's Sports Foundation's research of the last 50 years of Title IX conclude: <sup>26</sup>


- Only seven states offered athletic opportunities to female athletes proportional to the enrollment of female students in their schools.
- Fifty years after Title IX was enacted, 86% of NCAA institutions across all divisions offered higher rates of athletic opportunities to male athletes disproportionate to their enrollment.



1124686114/Eugenio Marongiu

For the 2019-2020 academic year, the gap favoring male athletes represented <sup>27</sup>

**58,913** missed opportunities for female athletes. 

**\$252** million more dollars received in athletic scholarships by male athletes. 

If athletic departments offered athletic opportunities to female athletes proportional to enrollment, they would have had to award an additional \$750 million in athletic scholarship assistance.

This imbalance is highly noticeable to the public. People of all backgrounds believe in the importance of treating female athletes equally when it comes to sports.

- 72% of consumers say, *'I'd like to see female athletes portrayed in an authentic way that focuses on their skill and athleticism'*<sup>28</sup>
- 71% of consumers say, *'Athletes should be paid based on their performance and overall contribution to the sport/sports organization, regardless of their gender'*<sup>29</sup>
- 69% of consumers say, *'Women athletes are just as capable as men but not given the same funding, training, and coaching opportunities'*<sup>30</sup>

Consumers are now demanding that brands stand behind values that consistently demonstrate inclusion and create meaningful change.

**72%**

of consumers agree, "It's important to me that the companies I buy from celebrate diversity of all kinds."<sup>31</sup>

**77%**

of consumers agree, "I prefer to buy from companies and brands that are involved in supporting issues and causes that create social good in society."<sup>32</sup>



1131212764/Christopher Robbins

## How Brands Can Make an Impact

Change is needed now for women and girls who play sports. Activist and educator Marian Wright Edelman once said, “You can’t be what you can’t see.” Visuals are just one tool to help reimagine what’s possible for gender equity in sports. Brands, advertisers, and media organizations play a crucial role in promoting gender equality to the masses.

When representing women and girls playing sports at all levels, be it for fun, on a youth team, or on the college or professional level, here are some things to consider when making visual choices:



665406673/Klaus Vedfelt



Are you showing women playing sports thoughtfully and authentically while representing a range of emotions and body types?



1343629020/Flash



Are you showing women and girls who are competitive athletes - whether on teams or playing individual sports - as active, capable and skilled in their sport of choice?





1330684739/Hannah Bailey

**3** Is your representation of women and girls in sport intersectional? Are you highlighting women and girls of all races, disabilities, ages, body types, etc.?



631125069/Klaus Vedfelt



1210136741 /JohnnyGreig

## Summary

Despite the passage of Title IX 50 years ago, the understanding and acceptance of women and girls of every race, religion, sexual orientation, age or disability in sports still has a ways to go.

Getty Images believes, and validates through its proprietary research, that images have the power to change perceptions. We know that when inclusiveness and diversity are considered in visual communication, unbiased, authentic representation is created that can promote understanding, shift mindsets, and help create lasting connections between brands and consumers. Please read our **Women and Girls in Sports Visual Guidelines** for detailed guidance on how to make inclusive and equitable choices in your sports visuals.

Upholding ideas about what is aspirational, who can lead, who can participate, and who can win is a mission we share with the Women's Sports Foundation. We also believe it is the responsibility of our media partners to close the visibility gap for women in sports. Working together, we know that when we see the change, we can be the change. To find out more about Title IX, click [here](#) to see the Women's Sports Foundation's newest research report, '50 Years of Title IX: We're Not Done Yet' and [here](#) for our interactive timeline of key moments spanning the last five decades since the passage of Title IX.

<sup>13</sup> Staurowsky, E. J., Flowers, C. L., Busuvis, E., Darvin, L., & Welch, N. (2022). *50 Years of Title IX: We're Not Done Yet*. Women's Sports Foundation.  
<sup>4</sup> Zarrett, N., Cooky, C., & Veliz, P.T. (2019). *Coaching through a Gender Lens: Maximizing Girls' Play and Potential*. Women's Sports Foundation  
<sup>5</sup> NCAA Sports Sponsorship and Participation Report, 1971-72 and 2020-21  
<sup>6</sup> Staurowsky, E. J., Flowers, C. L., Busuvis, E., Darvin, L., & Welch, N. (2022). *50 Years of Title IX: We're Not Done Yet*. Women's Sports Foundation  
<sup>7</sup> *One and Done: The Long Eclipse of Women's Televised Sports (1989-2019)*, Cheryl Cooky, LaToya D. Council, Maria A. Mears and Michael A. Messner.  
<sup>8,9</sup> Getty Images, Most Popular Editorial Visuals, 2021  
<sup>10</sup> United Nations  
<sup>11</sup> Oxford Dictionaries Online

<sup>12-13</sup> Getty Images, VisualGPS, 2021  
<sup>14</sup> National Women's Law Center & Poverty & Race Research Action Council. (2015)  
<sup>15</sup> Staurowsky, E. J., Flowers, C. L., Busuvis, E., Darvin, L., & Welch, N. (2022). *50 Years of Title IX: We're Not Done Yet*. Women's Sports Foundation  
<sup>16</sup> NCAA Demographic Database 2020-2021  
<sup>17</sup> Getty Images, VisualGPS, 2021  
<sup>18</sup> Catalyst  
<sup>19</sup> Getty Images, VisualGPS, 2021  
<sup>20</sup> NY Times  
<sup>21</sup> CDC  
<sup>22</sup> Staurowsky, E. J., Flowers, C. L., Busuvis, E., Darvin, L., & Welch, N. (2022).

*50 Years of Title IX: We're Not Done Yet*. Women's Sports Foundation.  
<sup>23</sup> Getty Images, VisualGPS, 2021  
<sup>24-25</sup> Staurowsky, E. J., Flowers, C. L., Busuvis, E., Darvin, L., & Welch, N. (2022). *50 Years of Title IX: We're Not Done Yet*. Women's Sports Foundation.  
<sup>26</sup> Staurowsky, E. J., Flowers, C. L., Busuvis, E., Darvin, L., & Welch, N. (2022). *50 Years of Title IX: We're Not Done Yet*. Women's Sports Foundation; (Webster, K. (2020)  
<sup>27</sup> Staurowsky, E. J., Flowers, C. L., Busuvis, E., Darvin, L., & Welch, N. (2022). *50 Years of Title IX: We're Not Done Yet*. Women's Sports Foundation.  
<sup>28-29</sup> Getty Images, VisualGPS, 2021