Shoot Brief for Contributors:

DIVERSITY

DISSOLVE

INTRODUCTION

With the immense cultural shift emphasizing representation of all people, it's imperative that filmmakers mirror the diverse world we live in — and they're beginning to understand the power of such representation. Films and television shows have increased the visibility of minorities, and advertising campaigns are following suit.

So, when you're shooting footage for Dissolve, diversity should be a key consideration. We are actively seeking footage that shows diversity in a natural and authentic way. This includes footage featuring people of color, members of the LGBT community, people living with disabilities, people from all socioeconomic classes, and realistic portrayals of all body types.

The inclusion of all kinds of people in advertising, TV, and film — in a realistic way — is crucial to educating society now and generations to come. More — and more accurate — representation for more groups means success for everyone. Avoid stereotypes, biases, and clichés. Portray every community in a way that is respectful, tasteful, empowering, and truthful.

In this brief, we provide suggestions for how to achieve this in your footage.

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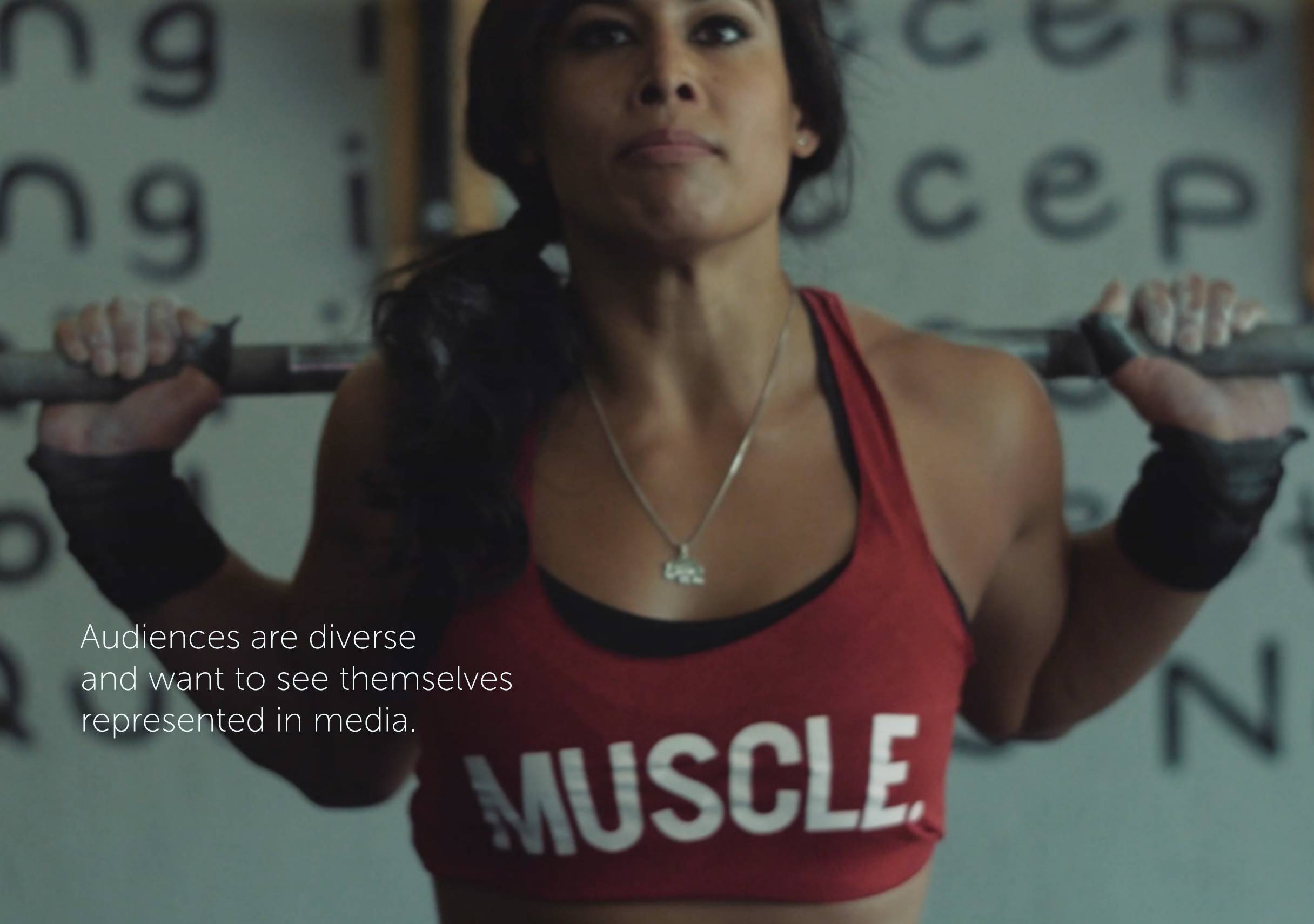
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RACIAL DIVERSITY

As the world becomes increasingly connected, clips capturing racial diversity are among our most popular. Audiences are diverse and want to see themselves represented in media. *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* actor Riz Ahmed spoke about this subject: "If you're used to seeing yourself reflected in culture, I really want you to take a minute to understand how much it means to someone who doesn't see themselves reflected back," he said. "Every time you see yourself in a magazine or on a billboard, TV, film, it's a message that you matter, that you're part of the national story, that you're valued. You feel represented."

But it's not enough to simply show diversity — it must be done authentically. Speaking with *Variety*, Universal chairman Jeff Shell warned, "If you try to be diverse for the sake of being diverse, it's going to fail." Don't film your models in stereotypical or forced situations. If you're portraying unique cultural traditions, do so respectfully. Don't objectify or "other" people or their traditions. They should be a seamless part of a scene or environment, engaged in realistic, everyday situations.

Metadata is important, too. Clients want specificity with their footage. Don't describe people only by their skin color — take notes about your models' background and provide as much information as possible with your footage. Otherwise, you are lumping unique individuals together in one large, oversimplified group. (See "Metadata Tips" below for more details.)

LGBT

The LGBT community is fighting for greater representation in the media, and Dissolve is committed to helping that fight. It has never been more important to authentically represent gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.

Last year, Jill Soloway won an Emmy for *Transparent* — a series that helped revolutionize the portrayal of transgender people on television. In her acceptance speech, she urged creatives to keep fighting for more representation. "It's a privilege, and creates privilege, when you take people of color, women, trans people, queer people, as the subjects of stories," she said. "You change the world, we found out."

When portraying members of the LGBT community, avoid predictable clichés. Scenes of gay people should look a lot like scenes of straight people: going on dates, holding hands, getting ready for a night out, dancing, attending a wedding (or getting married themselves), doing household chores, running errands, eating together, or any other day-to-day situation.

Shooting the LGBT community doesn't mean you need to have a rainbow flag in every scene. People want authenticity in their stock, not in-your-face symbols or stereotypes dictating what they're supposed to think about each clip. Footage is subjective — different people will pull different moods, messages, and concepts from the same clips.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

People living with disabilities make up a large percentage of the global population. According to data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation, there are approximately 54 million people living with disabilities in America alone. Nearly one in five adults in the USA is living with a disability, and that number is predicted to grow substantially over the coming years.

Before you portray a disability, do your research. Disabilities take different forms — in addition to physical challenges, they include mental issues such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and the full autism spectrum. Stock footage and photography have been guilty of oversimplifying disabilities — sometimes even straying into the ridiculous. As the blog *Autostraddle* observes, a common trope is to portray people in wheelchairs who later abandon them altogether. It's a strange, insulting trend.

Source: Autostraddle, "How to Be Disabled, According to Stock Photography"

It's your job to avoid this tendency. For example, to portray a woman with postpartum depression, it would be easy to show an overly sad woman sitting next to a crib, her head in her hands. This is misleading. The same topic is better explored using a more nuanced image — for example, a tired mother driving in the rain with a child in the backseat. Sometimes a subtle image is the most powerful.

Avoid ill-advised and offensive images by working with models with all kinds of disabilities and portraying them in a way that is empowering, authentic, respectful, and representative. Ask them about their lives and for their own suggestions on how they want to be shown in your footage. Shoot a normal day in their life, showing both their daily challenges and accomplishments.

Show women in
positions of power.

WOMEN

Misogyny and the objectification of women are still sadly prevalent in pop culture. Because of this, there is a growing hunger for media that empowers women and represents their lives in meaningful, accurate ways.

When portraying women, avoid outdated stereotypes like the housewife, the shopper, the harried mother. Show women in positions of power, women working as scientists or in tech, work-from-home business women who also happen to be mothers, women serving in the military, a woman coming home to greet her stay-at-home husband — our customers are hungry for this kind of imagery.

Women should always be portrayed accurately, with all age groups represented. And avoid sexualizing scenarios that have nothing to do with sexuality. In "The Problem with Women in Stock Photography," writer Erin Ollila searched for women working out and was disappointed by the results: "... if you search 'women fitness' you'll find many sports bras with ample cleavage and women exercising with excess makeup." This is neither authentic nor a stereotype we want to perpetuate.

Also consider body type when casting models. The average clothing size for women in the United States is 16, and 67% of American women are over size 14. In other words, the so-called "plus-sized" models of the fashion industry are the norm. To reflect this, look for collaborators of all body types, and portray their physical features in a positive light. Don't portray your subject as being uncomfortable with herself.
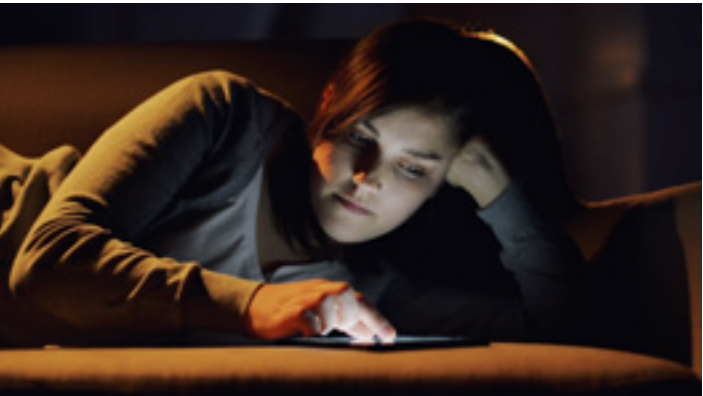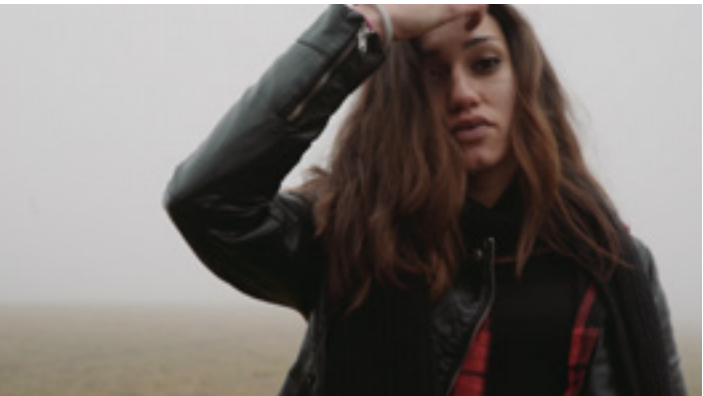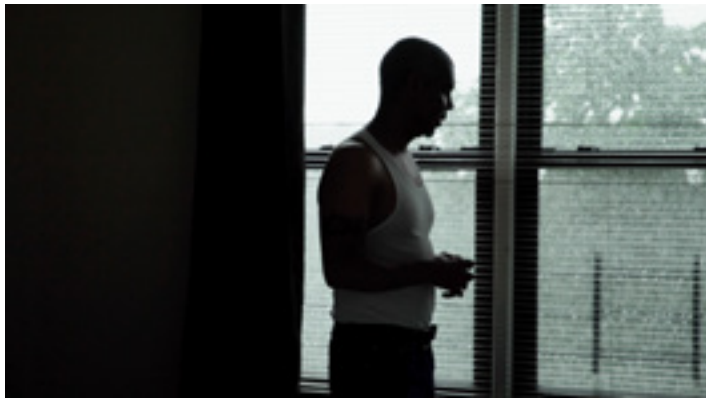
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

When shooting stock, it can be tempting to use clean, modern, and upper-middle-class locations and stereotypically happy, well-styled models. While footage of sleek kitchens, fancy condos, and the people who might inhabit them is useful, there is a lack of stock representing other socioeconomic situations. When you select your locations and models, consider all classes.

Authentic representations of low-income neighborhoods, working-class families, and less-privileged people are all valuable additions to a stock portfolio. However, it's critical that you represent them without exploiting or dehumanizing them.

Customers want relatable,
authentic footage.

SHOOTING TIPS

Diversity in every respect is of huge value to your footage: age, ability, race, body type, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class.

Always ask yourself and your models if the situation you're shooting feels natural. If the answer is no, it's not going to look authentic and natural to the viewer either. Customers want relatable, authentic footage.

Represent your models in a respectful, positive light. Consider their heritage, background, and lifestyle when shooting. Respect them as individuals — don't lump them in with a larger group or oversimplify their traditions.

Listen to your models' suggestions for achieving a more authentic shoot.

Don't shoot the most obvious scenario. This will help avoid stereotypes.

Obtain a model and property release for every shoot.

Shoot 4K whenever possible.

METADATA TIPS

Unless it is directly related to the content and subject of the clip, leave references to ethnicity out of clip descriptions.

In keywords, when possible include gender, ethnicity, and age group (e.g., "teenagers," "Hispanic," "mature adults").

Do not guess any person's ethnicity, gender, or disability — get it straight from your model's mouth and mark it on the model release so the information is accurate and retrievable at the end of a busy day.

When writing clip descriptions, focus on what the clip is of, rather than what it is about. For example, "Man in wheelchair traveling to work on a train" as opposed to "Disabled man dealing with the day-to-day frustrations of getting to work on public transit."

When keywording ethnicity, be accurate and specific. For proper terms, refer to the Glossary of Terms Relating to Ethnicity and Race.

When keywording disabilities, refer to the Glossary of Disability Terminology.

When keywording sexual orientation and gender identity, refer to the LGBT A-Z Glossary.

SOURCES CITED

"Here's the speech I gave at Parliament yesterday...," Riz Ahmed's Facebook page

Universal Boss Jeff Shell Leads Studio to Its Best Year Ever — Without Superheroes, Variety

Emmy Winner Jill Soloway: Topple the Patriarchy, Entertainment Weekly

Disability Statistics, Cornell University

How to Be Disabled, According to Stock Photography, Autostraddle

The Problem with Women in Stock Photography, Skyword

What's "Average"? Size 16 Is the New Normal for US Women, Today

FURTHER READING

Brands Are Throwing Out Gender Norms to Reflect a More Fluid World, Adweek

Study Shows Advertising Is Still an Obstacle to Raising Kids Without Gender Stereotypes, CNW

Changing the Face of Beauty