

Words Up: A Guide to Inclusive Language at Code and Theory

CODE AND THEORY

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Here's a truth:
Language is
powerful.

Language has such an impact on human beings, it can actually change our brains. (It's true.)

Becoming more inclusive across the agency starts with the highest ranks of leadership and goes all the way down to the words we put on a page. We want to ensure our progress feels good, and that more people are seen, heard, and represented in the words we choose.

Starting with this guide, we can change the way we think and communicate, inside our work and beyond—because being even a modicum more conscious of the way we use words can have a meaningful impact.

Perceptions
are never fixed,
and context
matters.

Language is an ever-evolving medium.

New phrases enter the lexicon; others become outdated. The context of language matters. The tone matters. The speaker matters.

And all of these things triangulate to make people feel different ways. Language also has origins, and they're not always commonly known. This guide is a place to help us stay up to date and keep learning.

This is also a reminder to think about how some parts of identity don't change over time (like race or sex assigned at birth), while others are more fluid and can change (such as ability, age, gender, or socioeconomic status).

Why does inclusive language matter at Code and Theory?

Our company spans the globe, representing countless cultures, experiences, preferences, intersections, and identities.

Language is a way to honor these differences, forge authentic conversations, and continue to cultivate diversity. Inclusive language is not about politics; it's about people.

The way we write and communicate should feel true to our values. Consider this guide a constant work in progress. It's open to contributions, never finished, and always evolving.

We have a
responsibility.

We're frequently tasked with being concise. But in that effort, we cannot take shortcuts or use language that is harmful.

We need to push ourselves against character limits, SEO needs, design mandates, and more to prioritize inclusivity in our work.

What we are...

Trying to do

- Encourage language that honors inclusivity
- Create a place to learn together and stay in the know
- Cultivate an environment where it’s okay to ask questions
- Use language that leaves all people feeling included and celebrated
- Write from a place that embraces differences as an asset
- Create content that is sensitive to the history and cultures of all people
- Avoid stereotypes in our choice of words and phrases
- Honoring the fluidity of identity

Not doing

- Shaming! No one gets everything right all time; this is about language and learning
- Policing people’s language
- Defining what is unacceptable or harassment from a legal or HR perspective*
- Creating hard and fast rules for the way we think and speak
- Speaking for individuals or communities, or ignoring their preferences
- Assuming communities all share the same set of experiences
- Treating any communities as ‘other’ or not the default
- Setting rules in stone

*Although we’d like to think that the guidance given here will help you avoid some issues

Getting real: Categories of inclusivity

Topics we'll cover

Under each category, you'll find an introduction, some advertising examples, language to adopt and avoid, and where future opportunities for more inclusivity lie.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Ability and disability	Age	Nationality	Race and racism	Gender	Sexuality	Appearance	Socioeconomic language

1

Introduction Ability and disability

How we write about ability and disability matters. One in four Americans live with disabilities, according to the CDC. That's 61 million people.

In speaking to and about people living with disabilities, start from these two principles:

- People living with disabilities have their own lives, ideas, and dreams; they are not their disability
- The disabilities people live with are not a metaphor for someone else's problems, inconveniences, or bad ideas



Advertising examples

Ability and disability

- 26% of Americans are living with a disability, but they are seen in only 1% of prime time TV ads ([CDC+Nielsen](#))
- “[People with disabilities] make up the biggest minority group in the world, but they are the most underrepresented in advertising.” ([Campaign](#))
- When including people with disabilities in advertising content:
 - Avoid featuring in a tokenistic way
 - Eliminate savior relationships
 - Promote parity between those with disabilities and those without (you could switch casting roles without altering the content meaning)
 - Don’t be self-congratulatory when this happens—the disability community has been waiting to be included for decades

When speaking about ability and disability:

Adopt

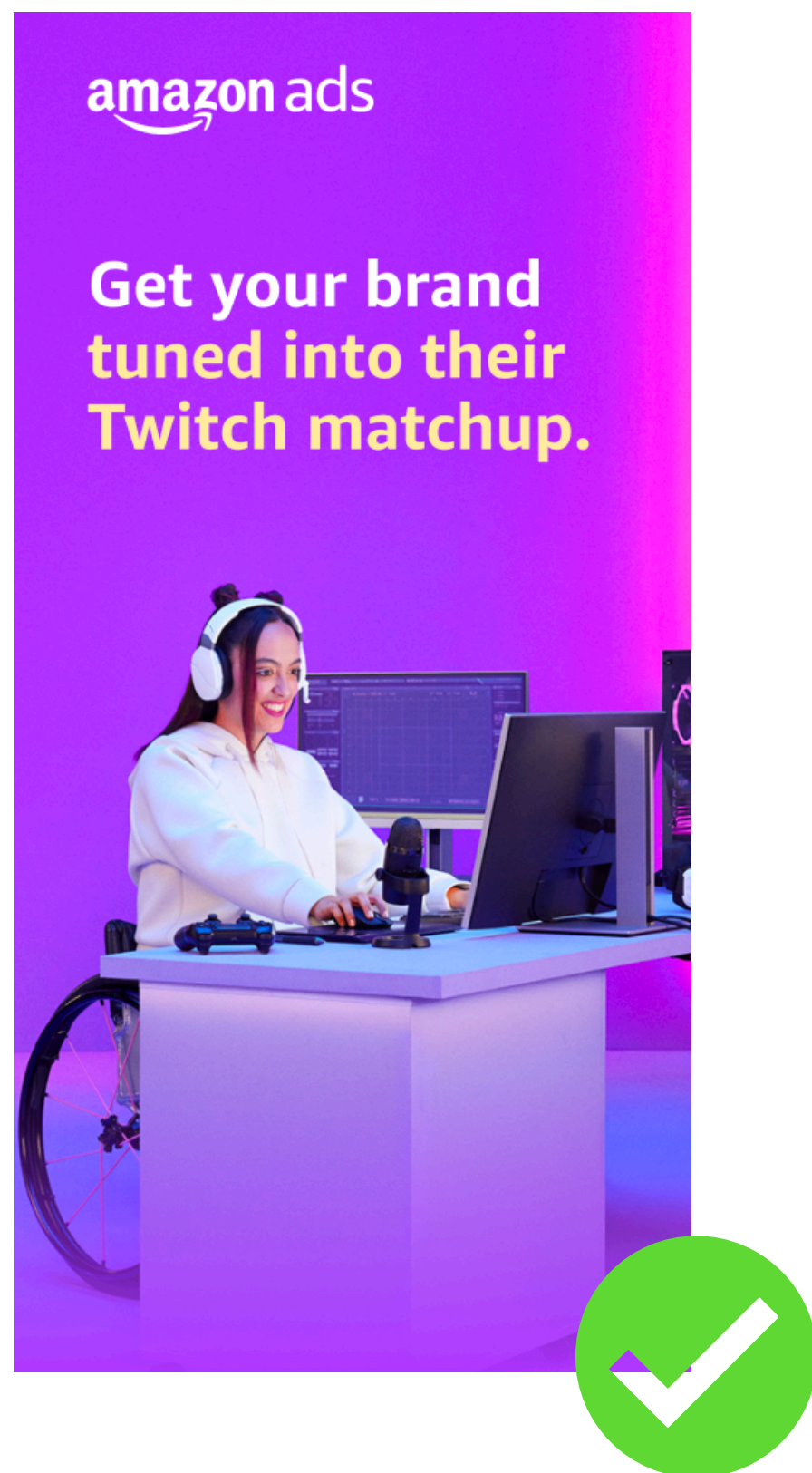
- Person-centered language—“person living with schizophrenia” not identity-centered language like “schizophrenic”
- “People with disabilities” instead of “disabled people”
- Whatever the individual person prefers to use, follow their lead (e.g., some prefer “autistic” rather than “person with autism”)
- It’s okay to acknowledge disabilities—pretending they don’t exist is unnecessary and unhelpful

Avoid

- “Normal” to categorize people without a disability
- Stigmatizing mental illness or mental disability: “psycho,” “insane,” “crazy,” etc.
- “Lame” as a negative descriptor
- Stigmatizing sensory deprivation: “tone deaf”
- Using broad, dated terms: “handicapped”
- Terms that emphasize or stigmatize limitations: “wheelchair-bound” or “confined to a wheelchair”
- Identifying people as their support: “wheely” for someone who uses a wheelchair for mobility
- Presumptive terms that define a person’s experience with their condition: “struggling with bipolar disorder, battling depression”

Opportunities

Ability and disability



Code and Theory goals

- Increase representation of people with a range of abilities in creative content
- Include people with disabilities in our work in ways that do not depend on their physical conditions
- Create opportunities for people of different abilities to see themselves represented in the brand outputs we create
- Make space for people by casting for various roles in creative content that are not necessarily dependent on ability

2

Introduction: Age

Ageism is prejudice based on age.

It often involves a tendency to imply that older generations are weak or inept, but it can also apply to younger people and the biases we hold against them.

Age is an unreliable indicator of sophistication and capability. Still, condescending language and stereotypes abound—from assuming that older people are not in-the-know to assuming that Millennials or Gen Z are entitled or “too woke.”

To combat ageism in writing, acknowledge the nuances related to age, consider each person as an individual instead of approaching them with biases, and avoid characterizing an entire generation.



Advertising examples

Age

- In a culture that fetishizes youth and an advertising culture often accused of ageism, ageist ads are unfortunately easy to find
- Here's E*Trade in 2018 mocking older adults who haven't saved enough for retirement and have to keep working
- And Duracell in 2019 making fun of physical infirmities in older people

When speaking about age:

Adopt

Older Generation	Younger Generation
— Older	— Confident
— An elder	— Learning
— Mature	— Ambitious
— Wise	— Aware
— Seasoned	
— Experienced	

Avoid

Older Generation	Younger Generation
— Geezer	— Entitled
— Senile	— Lazy
— Old fogey	— Inexperienced
— Old person	— Juvenile
— Over the hill	
— Golden years	
— Elderly	

Opportunities

Age

Code and Theory goals

- Expand representation of people of different ages in creative content
 - Ask ourselves if the younger audiences are actually the aspirational ones
 - Consider whether an age range with casting is actually necessary and if the role can be explored without age as a factor
 - Include people of older ages in ways that don't hinge on their maturity
- Create an opportunity for people of older ages to see themselves accurately represented in our brand outputs

3

Introduction Nationality

Although nationality and ethnicity are often confused and used interchangeably, they are different things:

- Nationality refers to one's country of origin or the country where they hold citizenship; it's essentially a legal or geographic designation
- Ethnicity refers to racial descent or affiliation with a racial, cultural, or religious group, e.g., Al Pacino's nationality is American; his ethnicity is Italian
- When discussing an object or other noun's national origin, be as specific as possible, e.g., "We had dinner at an Ethiopian restaurant," not "We had dinner at an African restaurant"
- Only refer to someone's immigration status when it's relevant or necessary
 - Think about the context in which you are writing about a person's immigration status, e.g., Don't refer only to educated, white-collar workers as "expats," while describing people who work in non-office or service jobs only as "immigrants"
 - Remember: There is no single place of origin, race, or ethnicity that makes someone an immigrant or an undocumented immigrant



Advertising examples

Nationality

- Ads sometimes stereotype different cultures; people from Ireland wearing kilts and playing bagpipes, Italians eating pasta, etc.—we should avoid these cliché visual tropes and consider heritage in a much more thoughtful, nuanced way
- When writing about nationality, it's important to think critically about what we've been taught and what stereotypes we perpetuate in our thinking
- The John Cena ad explores how the "average" American isn't actually so average because of the vast diversity represented in the country, encouraging viewers to think of American patriotism as a celebration of the different individuals, origins, and identities that the United States is comprised of, rather than seeing them as "other"

When speaking about citizenship:

Understand that our culture incorrectly uses terms like “undocumented” to describe a wide range of circumstances. It’s important to be as specific as possible to recognize the nuances in residency and citizenship.

Adopt

- Undocumented* immigrant
- Person seeking legal citizenship
- Unauthorized immigrant
- Undocumented* worker
- Unnaturalized
- Asylum seeker

*People may have documents, but not always the ones required in different contexts, so be thoughtful about use of this term

Avoid





- Illegal immigrant
- Illegal alien
- Alien
- Illegals—the term “illegal” describes an action, not a human being

When speaking about people of Latin American descent:

How people of Latin American descent identify themselves is a complex as the history of Latin America itself. Primary language, location, heritage, gender identity, generation, and so much more go into the myriad ways people describe themselves. Here are a few terms for you to consider when describing the community. You can find expanded definitions in the glossary.

Want to:

Try:

Describe the community in an increasingly popular, gender-neutral way that Spanish speakers will appreciate?		<u>Latine</u> (pronounced <u>La-tihn-eh</u>) Example: There’s a large Latine community in New York.
Speak to the largely US-based, English-speaking community and not worry about being consistent with Spanish?		<u>Latinx</u> (pronounced <u>Lah-tihn-ehks</u>) Example: Here’s a list of the top Latinx creators on TikTok.
Describe the community in a widely used and accepted way?		<u>Latino/ Latina</u> Example: She’s a Latina illustrator.
Cover multiple ways people in the community might describe themselves when gathering something like demographic information?		<u>Hispanic</u> Example: Do you identify as Hispanic or Latino?

Opportunities

Nationality

Code and Theory goals

- Honor people of different nationalities and ethnicities by speaking clearly and accurately about their origins
- Create an opportunity for people to see their countries and cultures accurately celebrated by the brands they love
- Feature quotes/voices from people to reflect lived experiences, where applicable
- If it's important to the role, try to cast people who are from the nationality or ethnicity we're representing for creative content for more authentic representation and performances

4

Introduction Race and racism

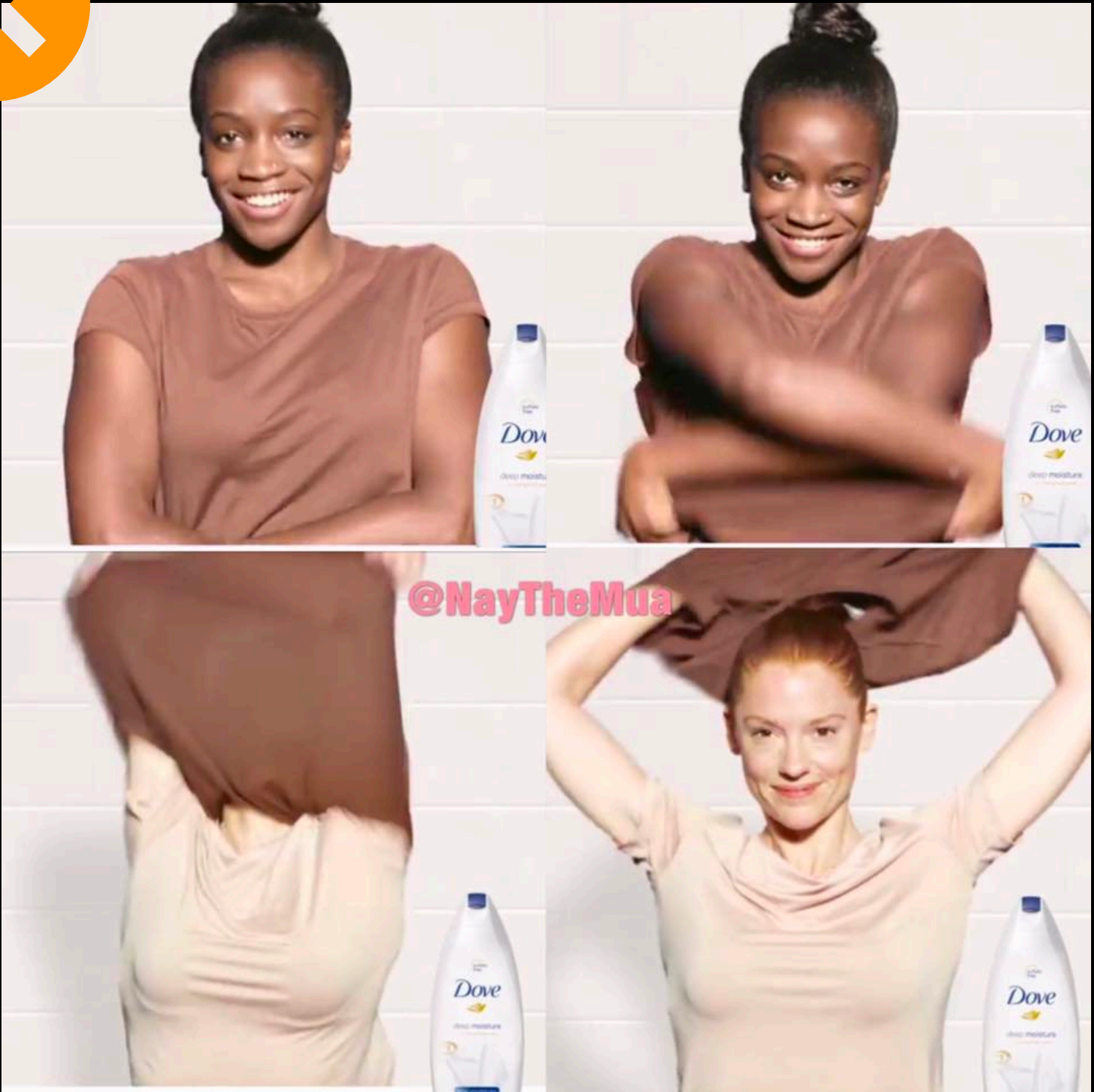
**"We don't just want to be not racist, we want to be anti-racist."
– Dan Gardner**

What does anti-racist mean?

The founders of the United States held racist beliefs and as a result, the country's systems, infrastructure, language, and more have racist foundations. Those systems were created to favor white people and whiteness, and will continue to discriminate if they operate as they are.

Anti-racism includes beliefs, actions, movements, and policies adopted or developed to actively oppose racism by interrupting its presence in our society.

By examining our language and removing patterns and terms rooted in racism, we can drive equality and equity with our words.



@NayTheMua



Dove Ad (2017)

Advertising examples

Race & Racism

Words, photos, and videos in ads can insinuate discriminatory messages, even unintentionally.



Nivea Ad (2011)

What to know

Race and racism

Drop the stereotypes.

Stereotypes are oversimplified images or ideas of a particular type of person or thing.

Avoid them, even if you think these stereotypes are positive. When you believe stereotypes about people based on the color of their skin, where they come from, or whom they pray to, you're only reinforcing feelings of inferiority by grouping people together based on what you think you know. At the end of the day, we're all unique individuals.

What to know

Race and racism

Don't assume.

Just because someone looks, dresses, or lives a certain way, doesn't mean they are what you think. Believe it or not, race, ethnicity, and religion come in all shapes and sizes. Did you know not all Black people are African American? Or not all Arabs are Muslim? If you're unsure about how someone identifies, ask respectfully or follow their lead.

What to know

Race and racism

Different people have different lived experiences based on the color of their skin.

Shifting to an inclusive way of writing and communicating requires us to ground ourselves and remember that we're all complex beings. Each individual is so much more than their heritage, race, or appearance, but these factors play an enormous role in the way many people experience the world.

Describing race appropriately and with sensitivity acknowledges and respects those lived experiences.

Let's celebrate our differences and learn from each other.

When speaking about race and racism:

Adopt

- Whenever possible, ask how someone wants to be identified and use their preferred language.
- Be specific rather than using a blanket term like “BIPOC”. Some feel that this term lumps all non-white communities together, ignoring their cultural nuances, but others feel it brings Indigenous communities to the forefront of conversations about race.
- Use adjectives instead of nouns when referring to a person’s race or ethnicity (e.g., a Latino person, not a Latino)
- Capitalize “Black” when referring to race, but not “white” Why?
 - “Black” refers to shared cultures and experiences (foods, languages, music, religious traditions, etc)
 - “white” is used as a physical description of people whose backgrounds may spring from many different cultures. The word “brown” in the phrase “Black and brown” is lowercase for the same reason.
 - Those who identify as white do not have the experience of being discriminated against because of their skin color, and capitalization of the word was used by white supremacists to establish superiority through language (AP)
- Use the term multiracial when speaking about those who identify as more than one race

Avoid

- Stereotypes (e.g., cliched dialect, vernacular)
- “Non-white”—being white is not the automatic default, and the rest of us deserve some held space, too
- Leaning on multiracial communities or representation in order to satisfy inclusion without featuring specific communities of color
- “Racially ambiguous,” “ethnically ambiguous,” “exotic,” “mixed,” “mulatto”
- Abbreviations that the community itself doesn’t use
- Asking “what are you?” when inquiring about someone’s race or ethnicity; if you must, ask someone how they identify instead

Opportunities

Race and racism

Code and Theory goals

- Use our outputs to help expand the way people see race in this country
- Honor the race and ethnicities of all people, allowing them to feel recognized and seen by brands and advertising
- Help clients prepare for a future where people of color represent almost half of the population and a present where consumers are demanding that brands speak responsibly about race
- Ask yourself whether a race identifier is even necessary

5

Introduction Gender

Gender exists beyond the binary; it's a spectrum.

It's time our writing starts reflecting that. First things first: understanding that there are endless ways that a person can identify—from transgender to agender to cisgender and more. We need to make sure our writing includes every single one. But writing for gender inclusivity doesn't just include the ways we identify—it also includes the ways those groups are perceived. Let's dive into it.

Some things you might need to know about gender:

1	2	3	4	5
Pronouns	It's innate	It's fluid	It's how they identify	It's not sex
You should always refer to someone using the pronouns they request. If you don't know them, you should ask, and that includes everyone, not just those you suspect to be non-binary.	Gender is an innate part of someone's identity, not a choice they've made. Saying "he changed genders" is not right. Instead, use "he transitioned."	Gender is still fluid, not fixed. People uncover things about their gender and identity all the time. It is never set in stone.	But remember, the way that someone presents their gender to others is not always the way they identify.	Gender and sex are not the same.

Tip: Introducing yourself with your pronouns (or including them in your email signature, etc.) helps others ensure they refer to you correctly and vice versa

When speaking about gender:

Adopt

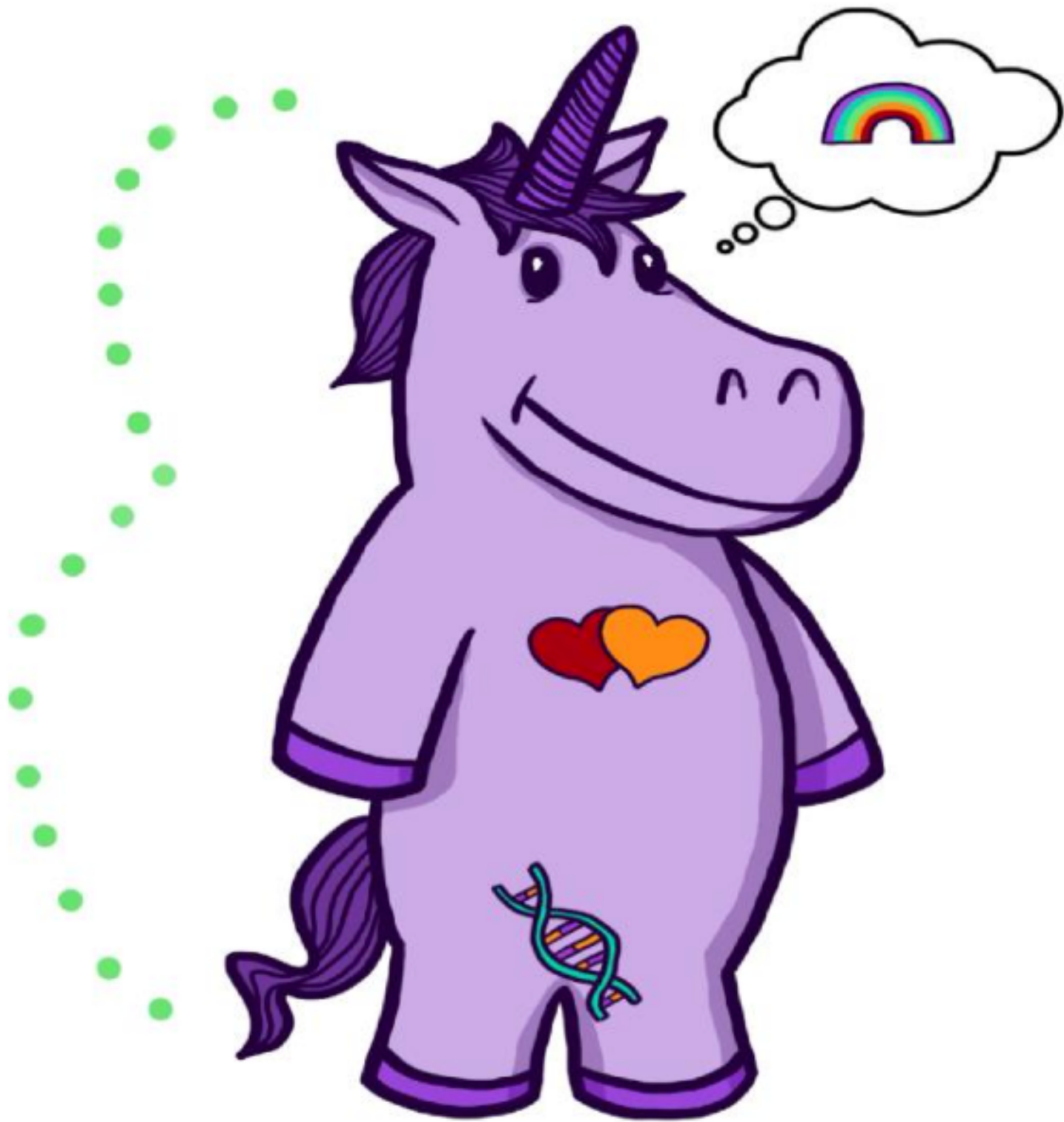
- Group terms that don’t include gendered words, e.g., “folks,” “y’all,” “team,” “crew,” “everyone,” “party people,” etc. rather than “guys,” “ladies and gentlemen,” or other terms that assume gender
 - “Hey theydies and gentlethems!” works too
- A gender-inclusive term to talk about different people—especially if you don't know someone's pronouns, e.g., use “their” instead of “his/her.”

Avoid

- Assigning gender to parts of human life—a sentence like “women give birth to babies all the time” alienates people like trans men and nonbinary people who can also give birth
- Language that perpetuates gender stereotypes
- Language that discriminates against any gender

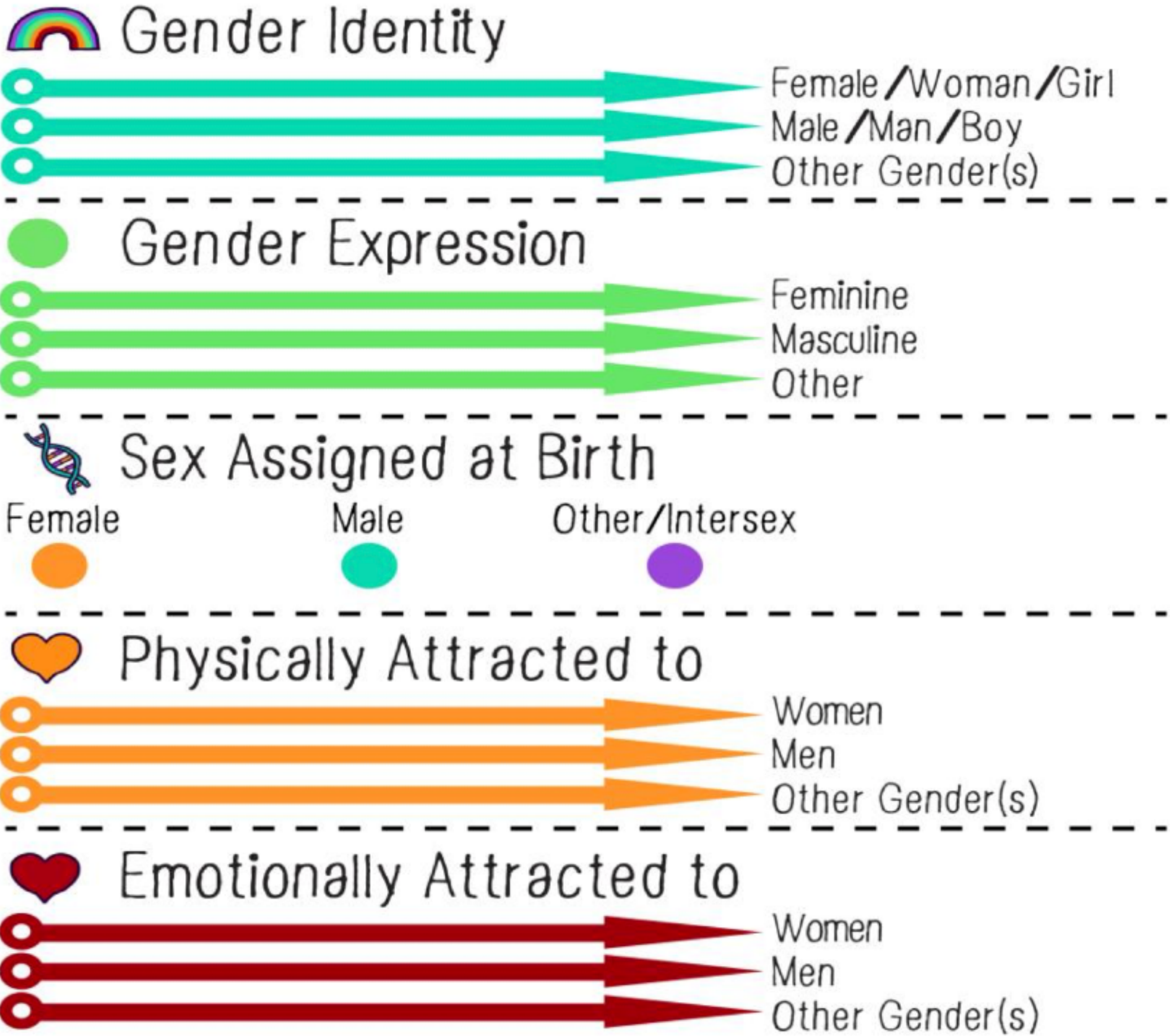
The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources



To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore



Gender Unicorn Definitions



Gender Identity: *How I identify.*

One’s internal sense of being male, female, neither of these, both, or another gender(s). For transgender people, their own internal sense of gender identity and their sex assigned at birth are not the same.



Gender Expression/Presentation: *How I look and express myself.*

The physical manifestation of one’s gender identity through clothing, hairstyle, voice, body shape, etc. Most transgender people seek to make their gender expression (how they look) match their gender identity (who they are), rather than their sex assigned at birth.



Sex Assigned at Birth: *The sex classification that I was assigned at birth.*

The assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex based on a combination of anatomy, hormones, and chromosomes. This is usually decided at birth or in utero, and is usually based on genitalia.



Sexually Attracted To: *Whom I am sexually attracted to.*

The group of people or genders to which a person can become sexually attracted to, if at all.



Romantically/Emotionally Attracted To: *Whom I am romantically/emotionally attracted to.*

The group of people or genders to which a person can become romantically, emotionally, or spiritually attracted to, if at all.

Examples of Genders: We included “other genders” to indicate the many genders that other people might identify as, express themselves as, and be attracted to. Examples of these genders include: Agender, Bigender, Genderfluid, Genderqueer, Transgender, Non-binary, Gender Non-Conforming and Two-Spirit.

Gender Inclusion

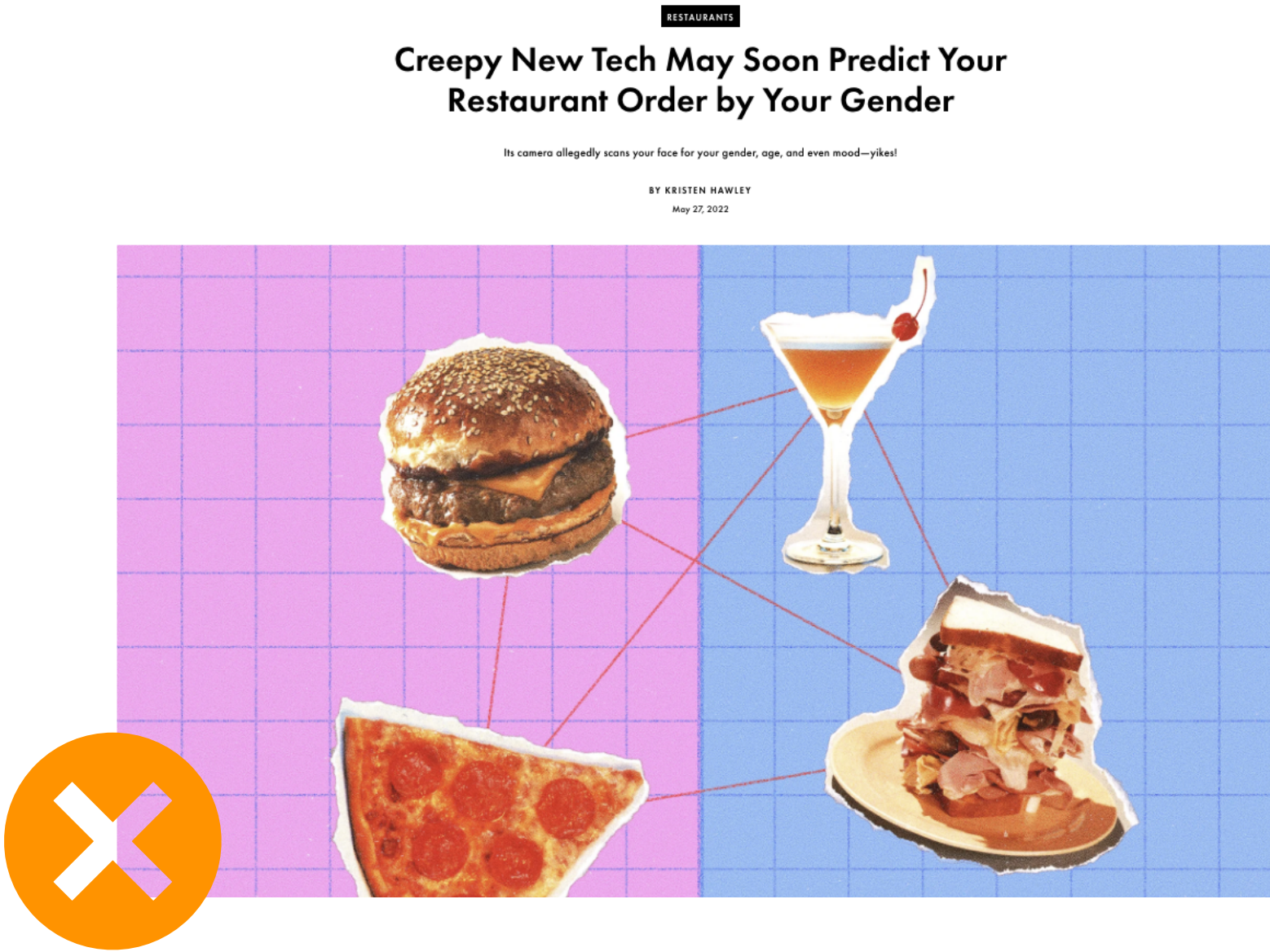


Alok Vaid-Menon
@alokvmenon

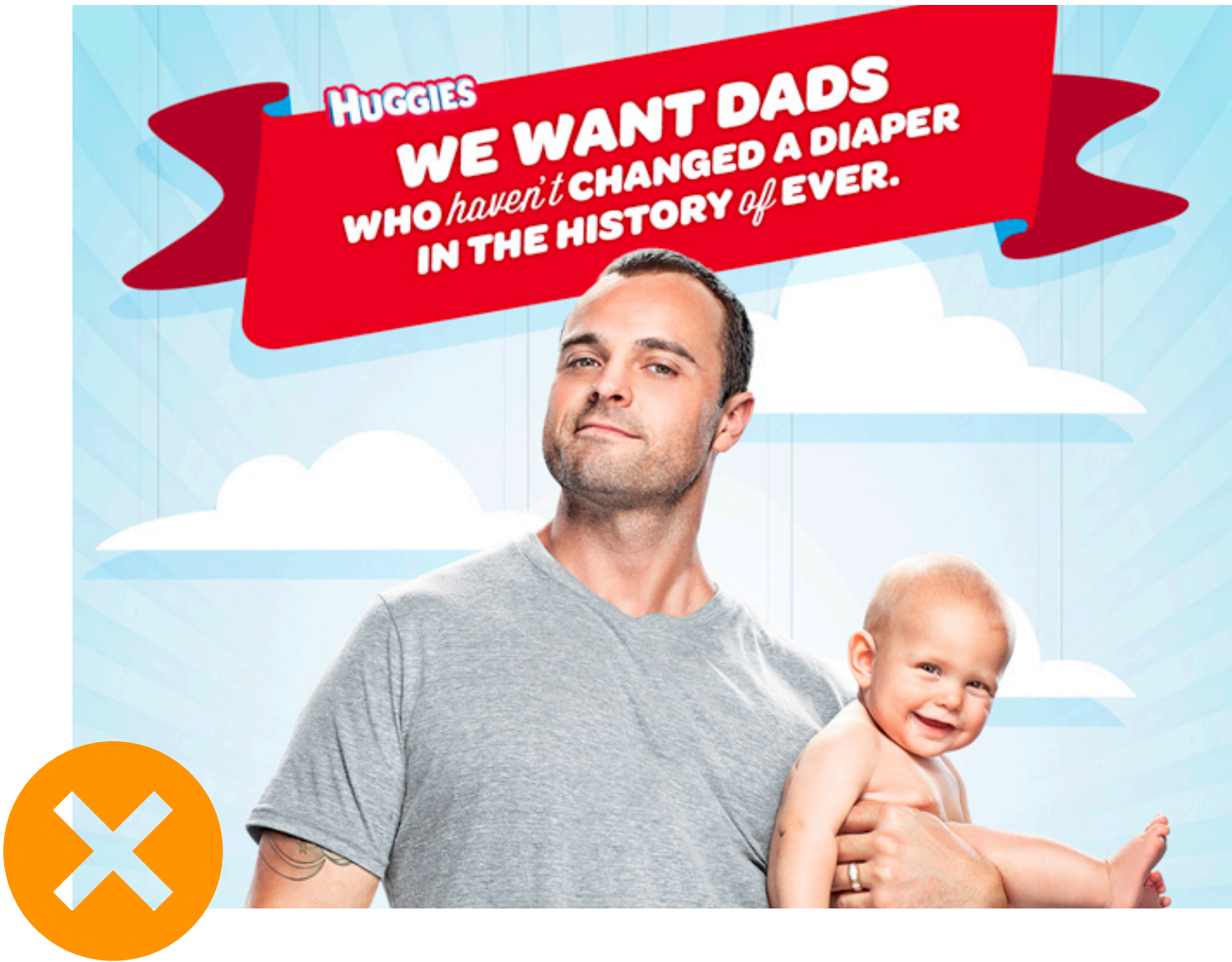
“Gender-neutral language isn’t about replacing an old norm with a new one. People have the right to self-determine their gender whether it be a man, woman, or a nonbinary gender. The goal of gender-neutral language is to get rid of gender normativity, not everyone’s gender..This is actually the purpose of language—to give meaning to concepts as they evolve.”

Advertising examples

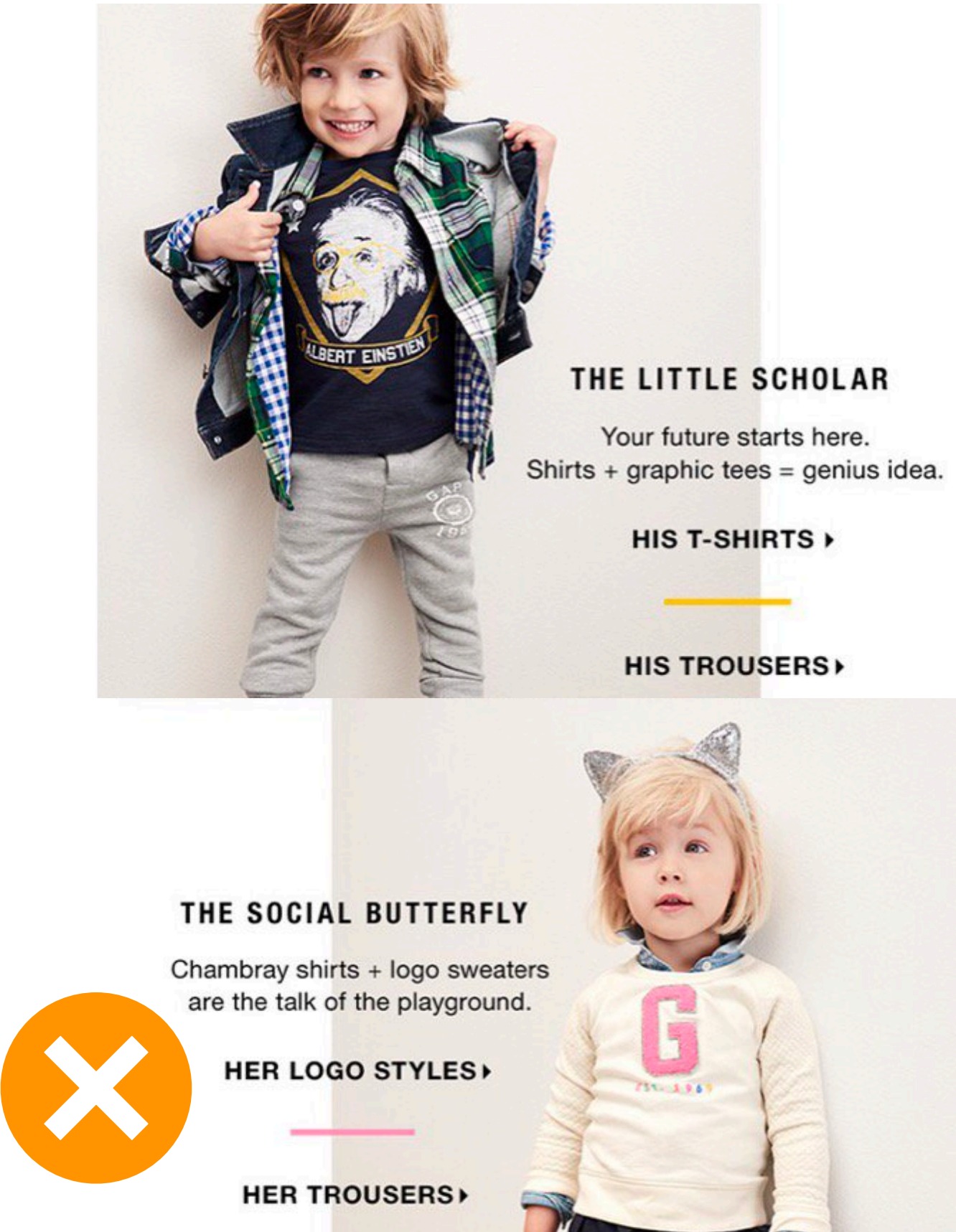
Gender



This technology implies that there is a “right” or “wrong” way to order based on your gender, which falls under baseless gender norms—there is obviously no way to predict an order by gender



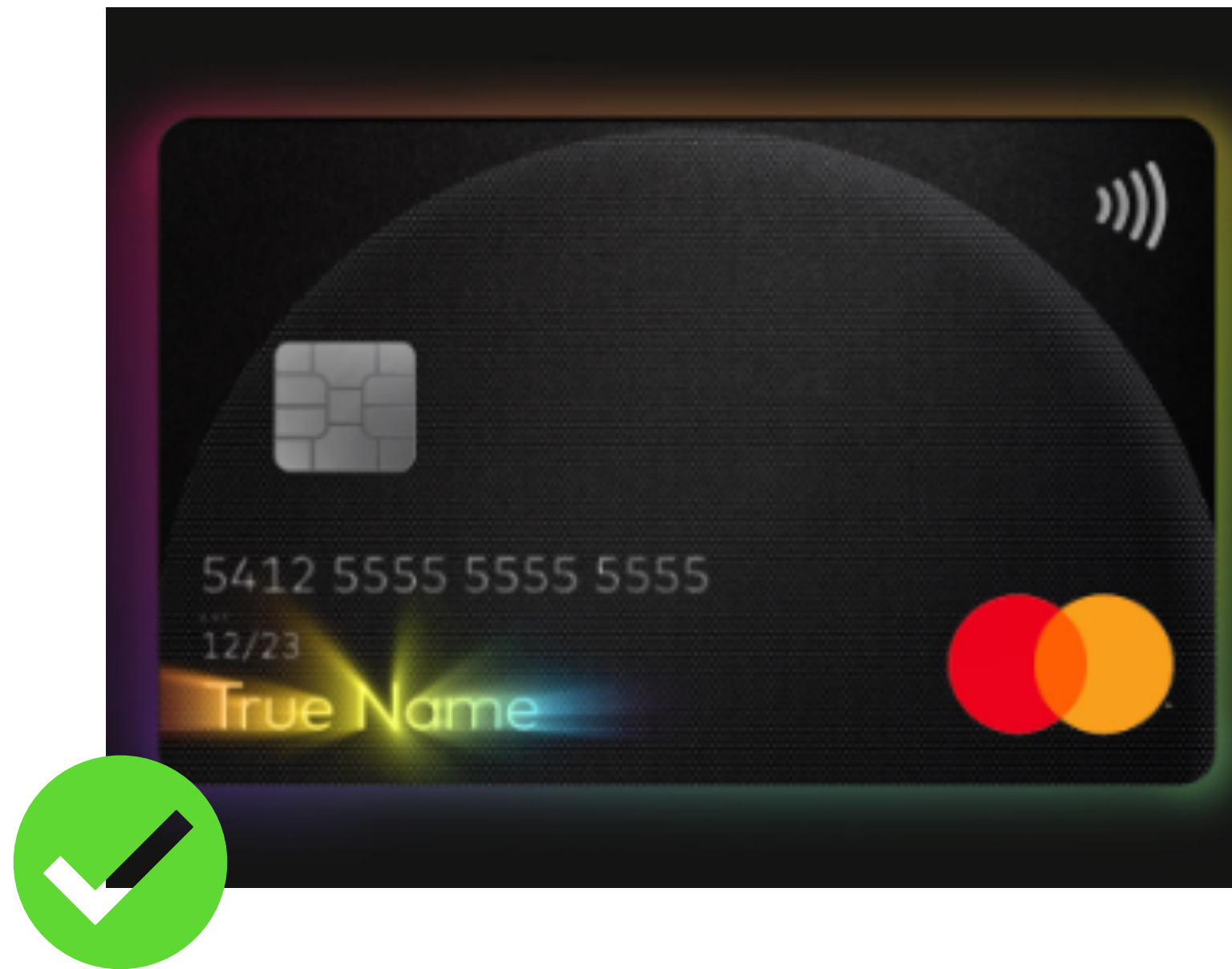
This campaign assumes dads have no idea what they’re doing with their own children, and reinforces the idea that mothers are primarily in charge of child-rearing, playing directly into outdated gender norms



Whether on purpose or inadvertently, this back-to-school website copy implies that little boys are using classes to learn while little girls are spending all day chatting

Advertising examples

Gender



For many, the name on their payment card does not reflect the name they identify with. This can be both an invalidating experience and a potential safety concern. To bridge this gap, Mastercard created True Name, a feature that allows people to display their chosen name on their cards.

Opportunities

Gender

Code and Theory goals

- Represent people across gender identities with respect and dignity
- Include people across gender identities in our work in ways that are not solely based on that identity
- Create an opportunity for people across gender identities to see themselves included and celebrated by the brands they love
- Make space for people across the gender spectrum while casting
 - Learn more about the complexities of queer casting [here](#)

6

Introduction Sexuality

Sexuality involves a person's identity in relation to the gender or genders to which they are typically attracted; a sexual orientation (i.e. gay, lesbian, pansexual, bisexual, asexual, straight).

Sexuality in our current society:

- By default, we exist in a heteronormative society and culture that drives us to think, believe, and uphold heteronormativity—the assumption that heterosexuality is the preferred norm, and privileges it over any other form of sexual orientation.
- This assumes and defaults the gender binary (the erroneous idea that there are only two distinct, opposite genders) and perpetuates heterosexism and homophobia.
- For example, we usually default to titles like ‘husband and wife’ or ‘boyfriend and girlfriend’ which can be limiting, especially for gender-expansive individuals who identify outside of the gender binary.

Advertising examples

Sexuality

Most LGBTQIA+ focused ads center around the gay and lesbian sexualities and experiences, which unintentionally exclude the bisexual, pansexual, asexual, and other sexuality identities and experiences—a form of erasure as these groups are not well-represented in mainstream media and pop culture.



OREO 'Proud Parent'

This ad tells the story of a father who initially was a little uncomfortable when his daughter brought home their girlfriend for the weekend, but eventually comes around and embraces his daughter for who she is by painting the home's fences a rainbow color



DORITOS 'The Best Gift'

This ad similarly tells the story of a father who did not know what or how to say that he supports and loves his son when his son brings his 'best friend' home for the holidays who he suspects is his boyfriend, but eventually his son that he loves him for who he is



Starbucks 'Every Name's A Story'

This ad is more about gender and identity as it shows a sense of affirmation and validation that a queer person gets from being called the name that they identify and resonate with—it is still relevant as there is no specific gender identity or expression for any specific sexuality

Advertising examples

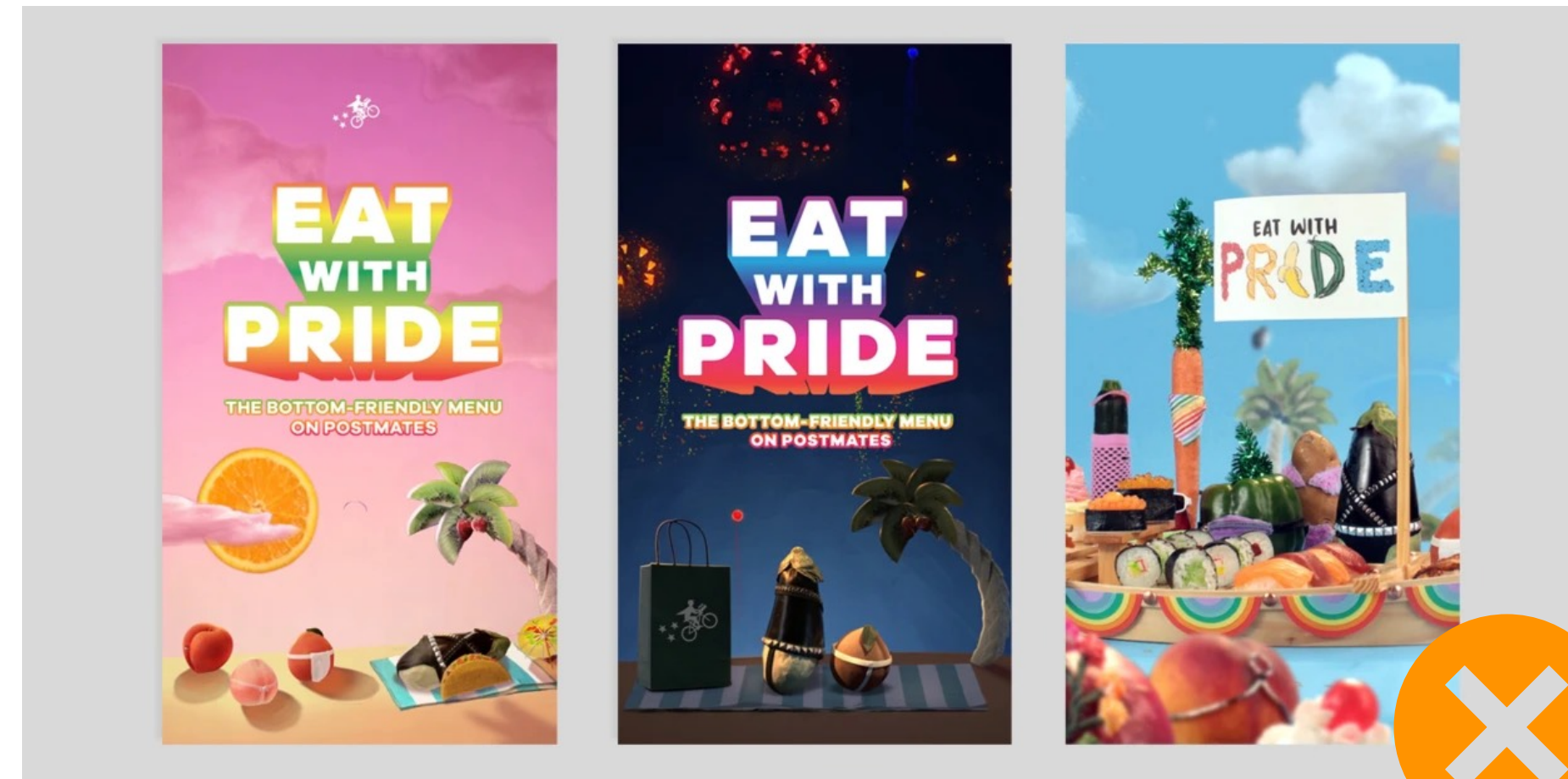
Sexuality

On the other hand, here are some LGBTQIA+ focused ads that missed the mark. In this case, both of these ads tried to be inclusive, but inadvertently perpetuated some negative stereotypes — ones that the LGBTQIA+ community has long been attempting to eradicate.



Burger King “Pride Whopper”

Burger King Austria tried being clever by offering up “Pride Whoppers” with two “equal” buns — either two bottom buns or two top buns. For many, the result was a halfhearted attempt at ticking the “we-did-something-for-Pride-month” box.



Postmates “Bottom-Friendly Menu”

Postmates created a “bottom-friendly” menu. While some could make the argument that ads like this destigmatize queer sexuality, many disagree. It’s important to note that many members of the LGBTQIA+ community have been reduced to just their sexualities or falsely stereotyped as overly promiscuous, so seeing ads like this can feel reductive and pandering.

What to know

Sexuality

Representation matters

- The narratives we write matter, so be intentional when including different sexualities outside of heterosexual people and relationships
- The LGBTQIA+ community is more than just the ‘gay community,’ so representation needs to be more open and inclusive to represent the many sexual orientations and identities

Sexuality exists on a spectrum

- People are not defined by their sexuality—it is and can be fluid
- Sexuality is only one way in which a person’s identity is dynamic and multifaceted

When speaking about sexuality:

Adopt

- Overall, the appropriate use of these terms may vary because individual people may self-identify in different ways
- ‘LGBTQIA’ or ‘LGBTQIA+’: While this term groups people identifying with a wide range of sexual identities together, its longevity may be due to its origin within the community, rather than outside of it.
- ‘Sexual orientation’ or ‘orientation’
- ‘Gay,’ ‘lesbian,’ ‘bisexual,’ ‘pansexual,’ or ‘queer’ to describe people attracted to the same gender or multiple genders
- ‘Nonbinary’ to describe people who experience their gender identity/gender expression as falling outside the binary gender categories
- Neutral language where possible and appropriate (ex. using ‘couple’ instead of ‘same-sex couple’)

Avoid

- Heterosexual bias that frame heterosexuality as the status quo and norm like ‘gay agenda,’ ‘homosexual agenda,’ ‘gay lifestyle’ and ‘homosexual lifestyle’
- Gendered words that perpetuate a gender norm or stereotype like sissy, tomboy, girly-girl, etc.
- Demeaning terms like ‘effeminate’ or ‘emasculating’ to talk about gay men and masculine-centered people
- ‘Sexual preference’ as it suggests that being lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, etc. is a choice
- ‘Gay’ as the descriptor for any and everyone who is a part of the LGBTQIA+ community, as there are more sexual orientations beyond gay
- ‘That’s so gay” as a euphemism because it is actually demeaning the word ‘gay’ as a negative adjective

Opportunities

Sexuality

Code and Theory goals

- Challenge heteronormativity by more accurately representing our society and including people across sexualities in client work
- Create an opportunity for people across sexual identities to see themselves and their families included and celebrated by the brands they love
- In casting, this means focusing more on the role that is required in content, versus the person who will play that role
 - Example: parent, mother figure, grown-up vs. "woman"
 - If sexuality is important for a role, casting people who identify with that orientation will lead to more authentic representation

7

Introduction Appearance

Humans come in all shapes, sizes, and colors — and we all have the right to feel comfortable and accepted in our bodies.

- What follows will explore these ideas: body positivity, body acceptance, and body neutrality
- These mentalities can coexist, are highly personal, and deserve nuance

What to know

Appearance

Appearance terms:

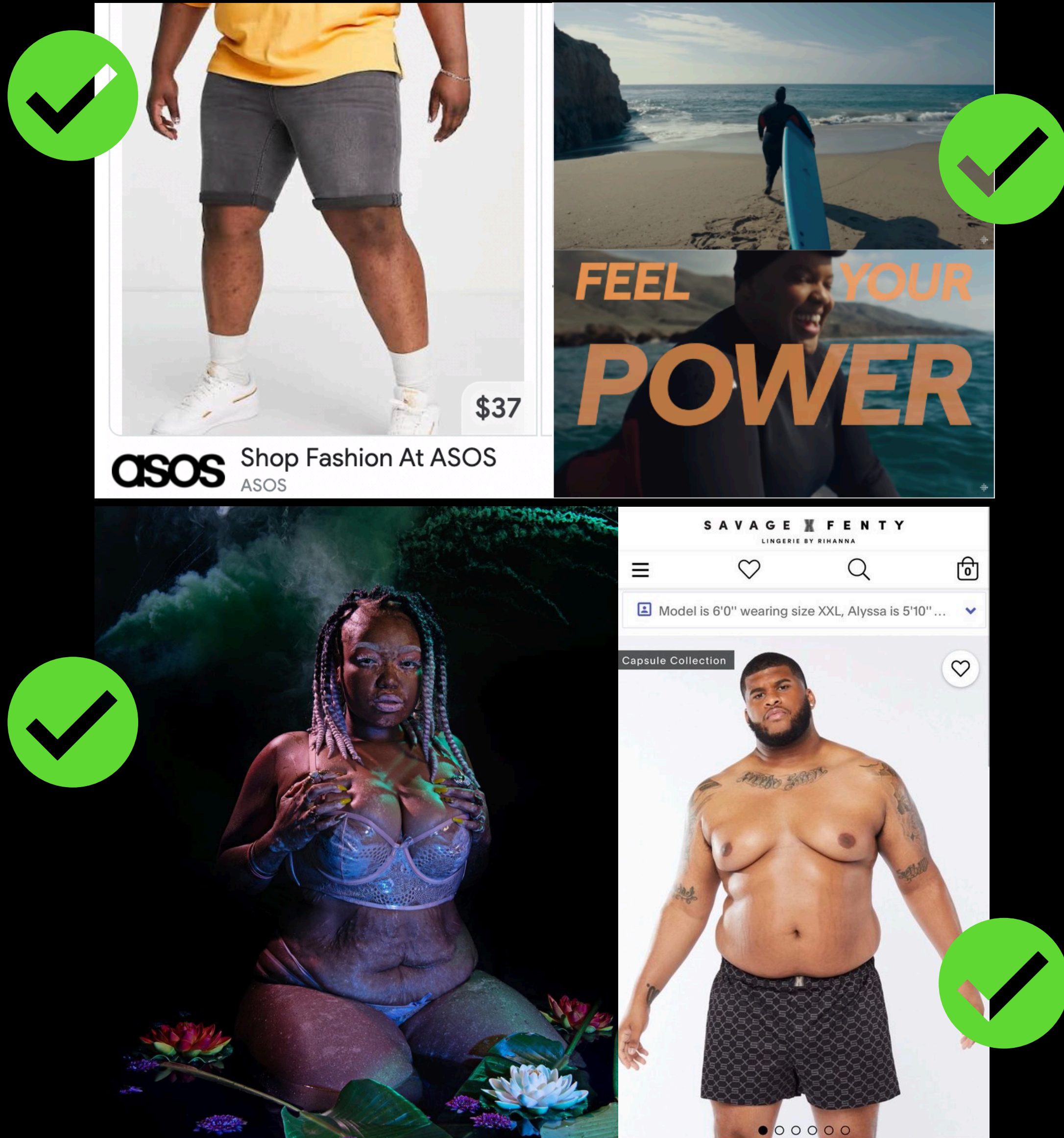
- **Body positivity** is a social movement and mindset focused on the positive perception of all bodies, regardless of size, shape, skin tone, gender, and physical abilities, e.g., “My body is beautiful no matter what”
 - It’s important to note that this movement, while well-intended, has also been scrutinized for “toxic positivity” and a lack of inclusivity for trans people or those who seek to make changes to their bodies, and can also run the risk of telling people how they should feel about their own bodies
- **Body acceptance** acknowledges that loving your body or feeling beautiful every minute of every day may not be realistic, and instead promotes treating and viewing your body with respect and care, including your insecurities, and finding peace with your body without needing to change it, e.g., “I accept and respect my body as it is”
- Instead of focusing on loving how your body looks or accepting your body as it is, **body neutrality** is a philosophy that acknowledges that your body is only one part of who you are, and emphasizes that bodies are neither good nor bad, e.g., “My happiness and sense of self is not tied to my size, shape or appearance”
- **These mentalities and movements are not mutually exclusive;** you can love your body (body positivity), accept and respect it (body acceptance), and acknowledge that your appearance does not dictate your self-worth (body neutrality)

Advertising examples

Appearance

- Inclusivity also becomes an issue when ads treat a particular body type as a universal ideal, as in this Protein World ad from 2015
- Ridiculing people for their weight—as PETA does in this 2014 bus ad—is obviously unacceptable
- This PopChips ad is problematic for many reasons: the cringe-worthy copy, the altered imagery, and the implication that if you only had the right snack food, you too could have a body like Katy Perry
- This Gold’s Gym ad, with the tagline “Put away your winter clothes” sends a message that certain body types aren’t “ready for summer”





Advertising examples

Appearance

- ASOS offers a range of sizes, shown on models that reflect a variety of body types.
 - Note how this ASOS ad says “shop fashion” instead of “shop plus-sized fashion”
- This 2022 Feel Your Power campaign from Fitbit respectfully depicts people of diverse body types as athletes
- Savage x Fenty ambassador @boitumelo_spotted is a body-positive model who lives with vitiligo
 - This brand also features size-inclusive male and female models and notes their height and item size so that users can get a better sense of the fit of their products
- Hanes’ Every Bod Is Happy in Hanes campaign features a variety of male body types, but it still applies labels, which can be problematic

What to know

Appearance

Shame and humiliation are ‘social’ emotions, tied to societal expectations and opinions of others. Nobody is born thinking their body is right or wrong—it is taught, learned, and reinforced.

- **Body-shaming** is making comments, criticisms or jokes about a person’s body shape, size, or other physical characteristics
- **Fat-shaming or size-shaming** are forms of body-shaming that involve criticizing or harassing a person about their weight, body type, and/or eating or exercise habits
 - Body-shaming or fat-shaming can occur even if the comment was intended as a compliment, e.g., saying “You look so great ever since you lost weight!” can imply that this person only “looks great” when their body is a certain size or shape
 - Comments like “Why did you order that? You’re so skinny—you can eat whatever you want!” can imply criticism of this person’s body or eating habits and make them feel judged for looking or eating a certain way
- In creative work, **think about who we describe as “fearless,” “confident,” or “brave”**

On Body Shaming



Lizzo

"When people look at my body and be like, 'Oh my God, she's so brave,' it's like, 'No, I'm not, 'I'm just fine. I'm just me. I'm just sexy. If you saw Anne Hathaway in a bikini on a billboard, you wouldn't call her brave. I just think there's a double standard when it comes to women.'"

When speaking about appearance:

Adopt

- While phrases like “plus-sized,” “curvy,” or “extended-sized” may help users find the right product, we should be thoughtful in how we use these terms when describing people’s bodies
- Inclusive-minded, positive phrases like “Fashion that fits your body,” as opposed to “Fashion that hides your flaws”

Avoid

- Referring to any one body type as “real” or “ideal” vs. another
- Phrases that imply that people’s bodies need to change, e.g., “Get beach-body ready,” “Shed your winter body,” “Cut your gut,” etc.
- Terms like thick, thin, man-boobs, dad-bod, mom-bod, hot-bod, pandemic-bod, etc. —before describing people’s bodies, ask: do we need to “label” bodies at all?
- “Confident” or “brave,” in reference to how a person’s body looks “different,” “unique,” “atypical,” or “unusual”
- Tokenizing body types or being self-congratulatory for including different types of bodies in campaigns

Opportunities

Body inclusivity

Code and Theory goals

- Represent people with a range of body types, but not because of their body type
- Be intentional about casting specs and expand opportunities for people of all shapes and sizes to see themselves represented in the brand outputs we create
- Avoid stigmatizing language, phrases, or imagery that reinforces stereotypes about people’s physical appearance—even if it is intended to be funny or complimentary
- Rethink what society sees as “aspirational” or “ideal” body types
- Educate our clients and partners on the importance of showing an inclusive range of body types, both from a business and a social-awareness POV

Case study

Cycle x Freda

A great example of intersectionality is this video spot from London-based startup Freda. Freda’s “Cycle” line is positioned as “an inclusive range designed to provide sustainable and reliable period care with no presumptions and no inhibitions.” This director’s cut video depicts three menstruating people of different genders, ethnicities, and backgrounds to illustrate that Cycle products are for everyone.



8

Introduction Socioeconomic language

Words that describe socioeconomic status can influence how a person or their community is viewed and how they view themselves.

It's why using language that maintains the dignity of individuals is so crucial.

What to know about socioeconomic language

Socioeconomic language	Try
Inner City	Under-resourced
Disadvantaged	Neighborhoods with high poverty rates
Homeless people or “the homeless”	People experiencing homelessness, unhoused
Welfare reliant	People who receive TANF benefits

See It in Practice:

From the NYT:

“On a sweltering July afternoon, **a homeless man** named Melvin Douglas biked up to his sleeping spot beneath the High Line, ...

From the NYT:

“On a sweltering July afternoon, Melvin Douglas, **a man experiencing homelessness**, biked up to his sleeping spot beneath the High Line, ...

*The term “unhoused” is also being used in place of “homeless” more and more. We recommend the person-first edit to the right, but see “unhoused” as another more-inclusive term to use. We will continue to update this guide as our language shifts.

Systems of oppression

Words that describe systems of oppression tend to strip people of their humanity and stigmatize those impacted by a particular circumstance

Instead of this	Try
Slave	Enslaved person
Illegal immigrant, illegal alien	Undocumented person
Inmate, prisoner	Incarcerated person
Ex-convict, felon	Formerly incarcerated person
Product of their environment	System-impacted (people who are impacted by carceral systems like police and incarceration)
Criminal justice system or reform	Criminal punishment system, carceral system, prison industrial complex
<u>Child welfare system</u>	Juvenile system, foster care system

Referencing communities



Nora Rahimian
@norarahimian

“It’s not underrepresented. It is systematically excluded. It is institutionally oppressed. Accountability starts with language.”

Referencing communities

Socioeconomic Language	Ask yourself these questions: Is this what you really mean? Could you be more specific?	Then try...
Underrepresented, marginalized	<ul style="list-style-type: none">— Makes a lack of representation seem accidental or unfortunate when the true cause is oppression	Historically marginalized; Historically resilient; (Historically) oppressed; Historically excluded
Minority	<ul style="list-style-type: none">— Suggests inferiority; focuses on a person’s difference— Becoming less and less statistically correct in the United States— Consider the context; being in the minority is very different than being called a minority	Global majority
Diverse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">— Centers whiteness by assuming that white is the norm (What are we diverting from?)— Treats diversity as the goal and makes it a potential check-box exercise	Inclusive, representative
BIPOC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">— Aims to use a blanket term to describe groups with unique needs and histories— Isn’t inclusive of all communities	Communities of culture, individuals of color. Name the group(s) you’re referencing in particular (e.g., Black/ African-American, Hispanic/Latinx/Latine, or Native American/American Indian/Indigenous American)

Everyday language that’s got to go

Drop this....	Why?!	Way better...
Master Bedroom	The exact origin of the term is unclear, but the word “master” carries a strong association with slavery	Primary bedroom
Blacklist	This term refers to a list of people deemed unhirable or undesirable—although the roots of the term aren’t explicitly racist, the word “Black” in reference to people deemed undesirable is a bad look	Banned
Peanut Gallery	A term used to describe a group of people who heckle or criticize, usually by focusing on insignificant details—it referred to the seats mostly reserved for Black people during the Jim Crow era	Chuckleheads
Cakewalk or “Takes the cake”	This term originated in the Antebellum South and refers to a dance performed by enslaved Black people on plantations	Easy, Wins
Spirit animal	Animals play an important symbolic role in the cultural lives of North America’s Indigenous peoples, but the term misrepresents and trivializes a great diversity of practices	Familiar, guide
Sell down the river	Originated in the Antebellum South, it refers to transporting enslaved people to plantations via the Mississippi river	Betray
Gyp or gip	“Gyp” is short for “gypsy,” a slur that means to swindle or trick used to justify discriminating against the Romani people, a nomadic group which originated in India and now lives mostly in Europe. “Roma” or “Romani” people are the preferred terms for this community	Ripped off
Grandfathered in, Grandfather Clause	A “Grandfather clause” typically used to refer to businesses that are allowed to operate under previous laws—its roots lie in Jim Crow-era legislation adopted in six southern states to disenfranchise Black voters	Pre-existing

Everyday language that’s got to go

Drop this....	Why?!	Way better...
Powwow	Powwows are celebrations among Indigenous peoples in many communities, and referring to a business meeting as one is demeaning	Regroup, meet, meetup, connect
3rd World Country	<p>Cold War-era geo-political designations identifying which countries were aligned with the West/NATO (First World), which nations are aligned with former Eastern bloc countries (Second World), and countries that were aligned with neither (Third World)</p> <p>Nations in the so-called third-world were usually countries once ruled by oppressive colonial regimes installed by European superpowers —the verbiage implies a hierarchy among nations</p>	Developing countries (though not the best), Majority world, Countries that are growing, LMICs (low- and lower-middle-income countries)
Off the reservation	Comes from a time when Native Americans were restricted to reservations, and their movement and activities were strictly controlled by the Federal government	Gone rogue
Open kimono/open the kimono	This sexualizes the process of sharing information; disrespectful to Japanese culture and traditional dress	Reveal, share
Long time no see/No can do	<p>“No can do” first appeared in the 19th century to mock Chinese immigrants speaking English as a second language</p> <p>“Long time no see” first appeared in the late 19th century as a phrase mocking Indigenous people—both are hot trash</p>	It’s been a while/Nope, That doesn’t work for me

Everyday language that’s got to go

Drop this....	Why?!	Way better...
Guru	This Sanskrit word refers to an 'elder' or 'teacher' in Hindi and Punjabi culture	Expert
Ninja	In an office setting, using 'ninja' to refer to someone who is an expert in something strips the term of its cultural context. As 'ninja' specifically refers to a highly skilled mercenary in feudal Japan.	An expert, a whiz, a virtuoso
Chief	"Chief" was used by Europeans to describe Native American leaders and did not originally come from within indigenous communities. Many see the term as pejorative, with phrases like "Hey, chief" used in everyday language. Some organizations are even beginning to remove the term from senior titles like 'Chief Executive Officer,' while others believe its original meaning in Old French ('leader, ruler, or head of something') is still relevant.	Head of, leader, senior



Say what?
Break it down: deep
thoughts, refs & recos

Evolving language in tech...

-
- In 2014, Drupal replaced "master/slave" terminology with "primary/replica." Django opted to use "primary/replica" too. Python, one of the most popular programming languages in the world, eliminated "master/slave" terms in 2018.
 - In tech, a blacklist refers to a directory of specific elements, such as email addresses, IP addresses, or URLs, that are blocked. A whitelist, by contrast, is made up of elements that are allowed. This comes across as black = bad and white = good. Google and Android have encouraged developers to use "blocklist" and "allowlist" instead.

Deep thoughts...

Why are witches always women? 🤔

Why are terms referring to women, female anatomy, etc. often used as insults, while terms referring to masculinity are often used as compliments? 🤔

Why is masculinity the default when we reference humans at large (e.g., “mankind”, “man-made”)? 🤔

Why are there cheerleaders for “men’s sports” but never or rarely for “women’s sports”? 🤔

Why do we still use Body Mass Index (BMI) as a universal measurement of health, when it was created with data purely from white Europeans? (More on that here.) 🤔

9

A glossary
of terms to turn to

A glossary of terms to turn to

Term	Definition
AAPI	A si A n A merican and P acific I slander. Sometimes also referred to as A si A n/ P acific A merican (APA) or A si A n P acific I slander (API).
Ableism	Discrimination against people living with disabilities, or treating people without disabilities as the norm or standard. In reality, one in four Americans live with disabilities.
Agender	Refers to a person who does not identify themselves as having a particular gender.
Asexuality	Asexuality is a sexual orientation referring to a person who experiences little, conditional, or no sexual attraction. It is not a choice, nor the same as celibacy. People in the community often refer to themselves as 'ace' for short. Learn more here .
Binary	The classification of gender as two rigid, polarized camps (men/women) rather than as a fluid spectrum.

A glossary of terms to turn to

Term	Definition
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Some people use this term in preference to “people of color” to highlight the unique oppression experienced by Black and Indigenous Americans, including slavery and genocide. We encourage you to use a more specific term if referring to a more specific group of people.
Cisgender	Refers to when a person’s identity or gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth.
Gender Expression	The physical manifestation of one’s gender identity through clothing, hairstyle, voice, body shape, etc. Most transgender people seek to make their gender expression (how they look) match their gender identity (who they are), rather than their sex assigned at birth.
Gender Identity	Refers to one’s internal sense of being a man, a woman, neither of these, both, or another gender(s). For transgender people, their own internal sense of gender identity and their sex assigned at birth are not the same.
Heteronormative	Treating heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships as preferred, the standard, or the norm. The traditional (and in many cases, continuing) lack of representation of gay couples or transgender people in advertising is an example of heteronormativity.

A glossary of terms to turn to

Term	Definition
Hispanic	This is a term developed to broadly summarize people who come from Spanish-speaking countries, especially Central and Latin America. It has declined in popularity in recent years as many feel that it centers the history of the region around the Spanish. However, many people in the community do still use this term, and it is often used when gathering demographic information.
Intersectionality	The complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.
Intersex	This is an umbrella term used to describe people with differences in reproductive anatomy, chromosomes, or hormones that don't fit typical definitions of male and female. Intersex can refer to a number of natural variations, some of them laid out by InterAct . Being intersex is not the same as being nonbinary or transgender, which are terms typically related to gender identity.
Latine (La-tihn-eh)	Latine is a newer alternative, gender-neutral way to identify those of Latin American origin that is more consistent with pronunciation in Spanish. Although it's gaining acceptance, especially with younger generations, it's not currently the most widely-used term.
Latino/Latina	This refers to people of Latin American origin or descent from an ethnic and cultural perspective. Though they mean slightly different things, it's often used interchangeably with Hispanic.

A glossary of terms to turn to

Term	Definition
Latinx (Lah-tihn-ehks)	In recent years, Latinx has emerged as a way to describe people of Latin American origin or descent in a more inclusive way, outside of the gender binary. Though there’s criticism of the term, as many feel that it’s English speakers imposing on the Spanish language because there is no proper pronunciation of an “x” at the end of a word in the Spanish language. It’s more common to see “Latinx” identified within the US. To some, it does have a corporate feel.
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual +. The ‘+’ sign leaves room for other orientations and identities that don’t conform to a heterosexual, cisgender standard.
Misgendering	Referring to a person in a way not aligned with their gender identity. For example, calling someone a woman who identifies as non-binary, or using he/him pronouns when referring to someone whose pronouns are they/them. Misgendering can be unintentional, but it’s almost always hurtful.
Neurodiverse	Displaying autistic or other neurologically atypical patterns of thought or behavior.
Pansexual	Sometimes just 'pan' for short, pansexual describes a person who has the capacity to form attractions to any person, regardless of gender identity.

A glossary of terms to turn to

Term	Definition
Queer	A broad term encompassing orientations and identities that don't conform to a heterosexual, cisgender standard. Once a slur, it has been reclaimed for use by and about the queer community.
Sex	The assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex based on a combination of anatomy, hormones, and chromosomes. This is usually decided at birth or in utero, and is usually based on genitalia.
Stereotype	An oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.
Transgender	Refers to a person whose gender and identity do not match the sex they were assigned at birth.

A library for ongoing learning

[Conscious Style Guide](#)

[NPR's Guide To Gender Identity Terms](#)

[Equity-Centered Community Design Field Guide](#)

[Boldist's Guide to Writing Inclusive Language and Copy](#)

[AP Style guide's inclusive writing guidelines for 2022](#)

[An Accessible Guide to Writing Accessible Content](#)

[A Move for 'Algorithmic Reparation' Calls for Racial Justice in AI & Big Data & Society Algorithmic Reparations](#)

Here's a general way to handle offensive language if you hear it.

Just say: "Say what??"



Thank You.

Have thoughts, examples to add or
questions about Words Up: A Guide to
Inclusive Language at Code and Theory?

<https://forms.gle/Sp3Ewkf3zwcAxnFy9>