

# The BDP People Library

## BDP Belonging

External Guidance for Inclusive Visualisations

May 2023



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# Introduction

For various reasons, including time and cost pressures, visualisations may be populated by quickly lifting from existing vector libraries, placing people without too much thought. This can sometimes result in stereotypical stories that may lack diversity or not providing an accurate representation relevant to the project location.

For this reason, BDP began thinking about how we can make our graphics tell more inclusive stories, so that we are able to create diverse and inclusive visualisations.

This short guidance document for populating visuals explores the idea of considering the specific social context and context of place, as well as bringing awareness to the impact of small details within images that can ultimately help to portray a sense of appropriate diversity and inclusion.

The aim of this document is to prompt creators to consider how to populate visualisations carefully, illustrating a true representation of society and being thoughtful of the stories we chose to tell through our visual communication with clients and stakeholders.

Most of our decision making when creating will come from the message we want to send, and it's a lot easier to make these decisions if we as a practice truly believe in and focus on inclusivity. That way, these important values can be included in the production process as 'critical' and not just a 'nice to have'.

Charlie, the BDP People Library Ambassador, is here to take you through this short guidance document, exploring a few simple guidelines and prompts for creating inclusive imagery.

*Hi, I'm Charlie!*



# Inclusive Storytelling

Each opportunity to use imagery to create a more inclusive and welcoming experience for the end users we are designing for should not be undervalued.

We are all limited to our own experiences, and it's not uncommon to naturally fall into the trap of representing things that are familiar to us. For example, a cis-gender, white, straight and young person is possibly more likely to represent the same type of person and experience in their work. Although improving, it's an unfortunate recurring sequence we see often and repeatedly in films, TV, print adverts and more.

However, as designers, our work should represent the diversity in our communities and client groups. By drawing and presenting diversity, we can challenge socially ingrained biases about diversity.

It requires a conscious effort and rewiring of biases, often some that we may not recognise we have. BDP have pledged to commit to critically examining the way we tell stories within visualisations, illustrations and graphics, and ask that all external collaborators involved in the visualisation production process do so as well.





# What's The Story?



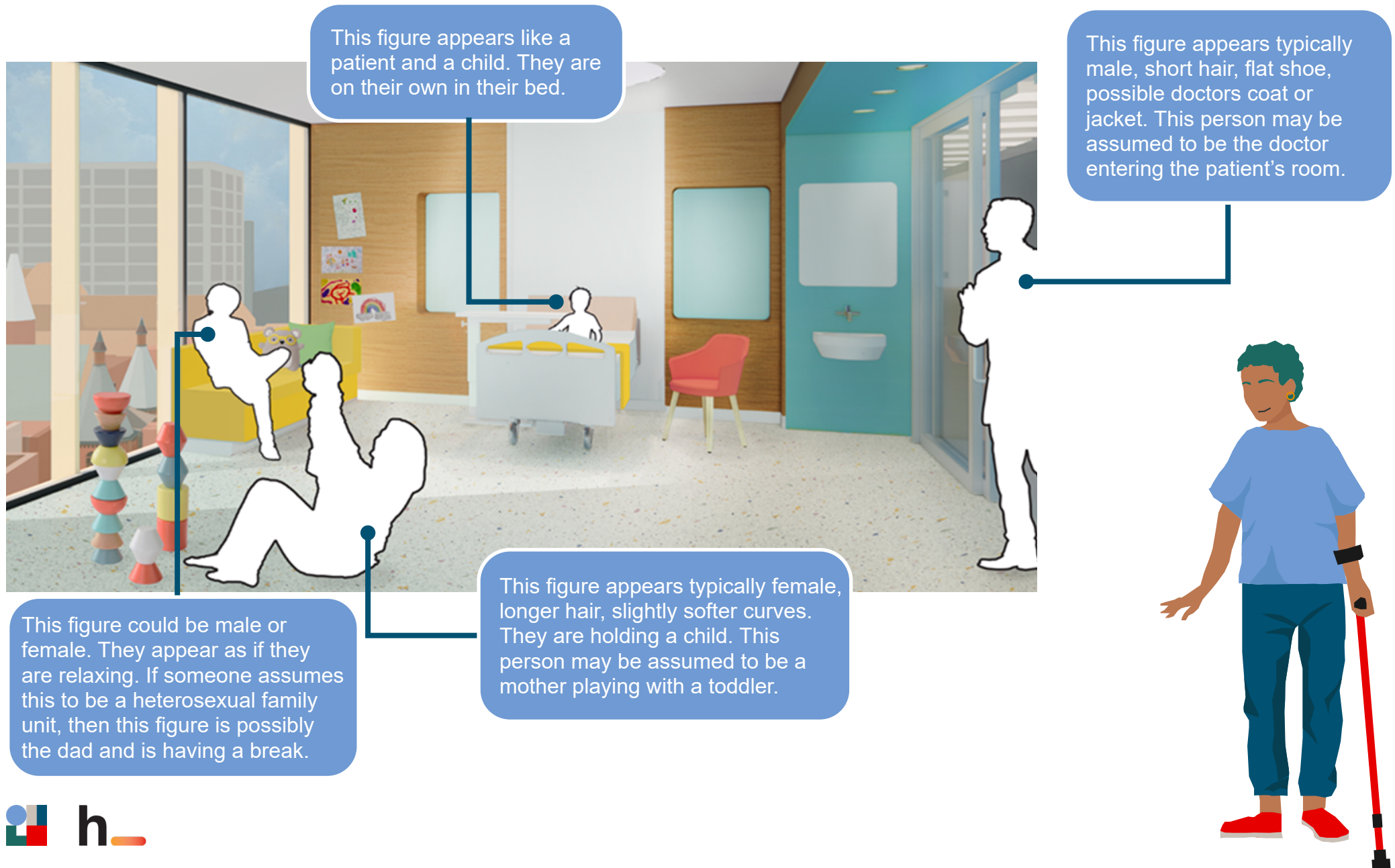
The people we choose to use in illustrations have an important role in communicating a narrative or story. We can break the above visualisation down to show how even simple outlines of figures portray a message.



*Let's take a look at this visualisation...*



# What's The Story?



# Telling A Story...



As designers and creative thinkers, we can challenge which stories we choose to tell. This visualisation challenges the one previous, which arguably presented existing stereotypes.

*Let's review this visualisation...*





# Telling A Story...

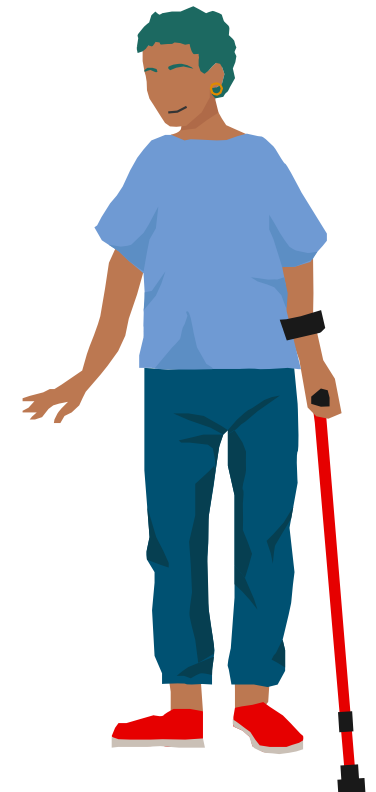


This figure appears to be a child and a patient. The patient is not on their own.

This figure appears typically female. They have darker skin and hair tied back. They look like they are the doctor, wearing scrubs and a stethoscope.

This figure appears typically male. They have a beard. They are taking care of a child with short hair who could be male or female. They are reading a book with a pink cover.

This figure appears either male or female, the viewer may decide for themselves. The viewer can decide what type of family unit this represents to them, as the visual does not make strong suggestions.



## Telling A Story...



*This visual has a good mix of skin tones and suggested ethnicity. There are 5 characters all with differing skin tones, but there is no representation of people with a disability. Therefore, this visualisation could be improved even further.*



# Suggested Guidelines

BDP have designed a set of suggested guidelines to follow and consider throughout the visualisation creation process, which have been broken down into five key headings:

1. Do your research
2. Represent all: be conscious of avoiding tokenism
3. Challenge stereotypes
4. Power in placement
5. Check and challenge



# 1. Do your research: *citywide demographics*

Look up the city / town wide demographic data for your project location. This will allow for more accurate representation of characters / types of people for the illustration. Try to proportionally represent the correct mix of demographics.



## 1. Do your research: *local demographics*

If relevant to your visualisation or graphic, go further and look up the local demographic data.

The website listed below can be used to search for any area in the UK by entering the postcode. It will provide demographic data for categories including:

- Gender
- Social grades
- Marital status
- Age
- Ethnic
- Occupation (*and more*)

[www.postcodearea.co.uk](http://www.postcodearea.co.uk)



*Researching the demographics of the project area will inform the accuracy of the drawn information*



## 2. Represent All: *be conscious of avoiding tokenism*

The point of diverse drawing and representation is to lift up marginalised communities by showing them and others the possibilities that exist for all types of people. When visualisations or drawings play into stereotypes only, even if the intent for diversity is there, they can have a counter-productive result. When drawings contradict stereotypes, they can empower those people who are hurt most by those particular stereotypes.

It is important to note that a diverse illustration can therefore also fail to be inclusive. While diversity is quantitative, inclusion is more about how those represented **feel**. Being included in something is one thing, but feeling like you belong is another. Being aware that diversity is only one part of the equation challenges us to thinking more deeply about the stories we are telling.

That said, there is still value in illustrating what can be interpreted as a stereotypical situation or character, where appropriate. What is important is ensuring that you have challenged yourself and the image to represent an inclusive community or story.

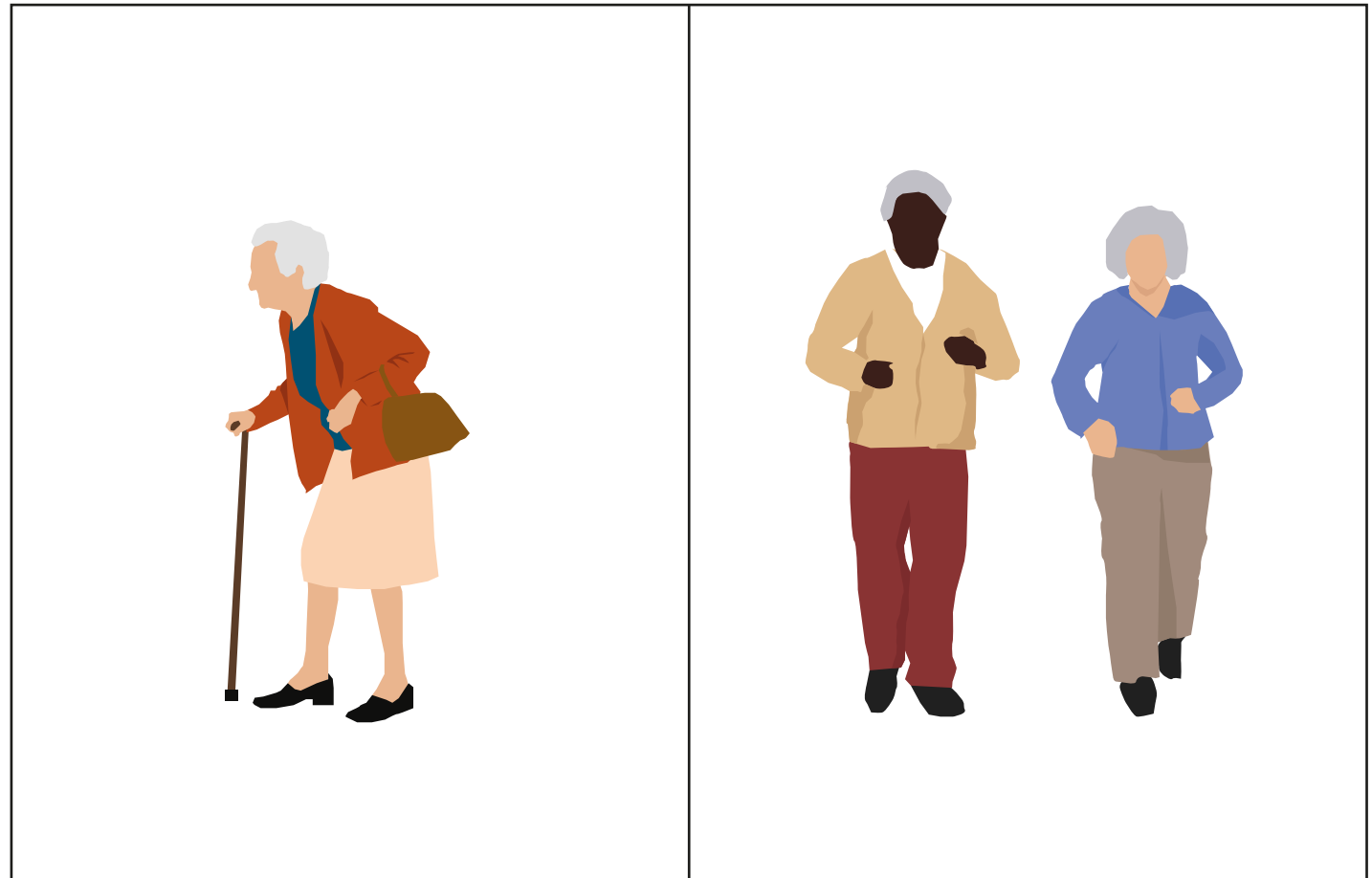


## 3. Challenge Stereotypes

BDP believes that designers have a responsibility to question preconceived ideas when it comes to representing communities and populated environments. We must actively address our own biases and recognise what the common depiction of a certain role might be.

Illustrations and visualisations that consciously challenge stereotypes might not always reflect our reality today, but it asserts and manifests that the future can be better.

If you need to illustrate a certain type of person i.e. an elderly person, use the opportunity to challenge how they might be typically represented, if appropriate to the context of the image.



Possible stereotype of an elderly person

Challenging the stereotype

## 3. Challenge Stereotypes

Both of these images illustrate the suggestion of parenting / childcare, but the image on the left conveys a stereotypical role of a mother, caring for a child unaccompanied. The image on the right challenges the typical assumption of parents, suggesting a male couple with their family.



Possible stereotype of a parent



Challenging the stereotype

### 4. Power in Placement: *who has the power?*

When we create an illustration or visualisation with multiple people, we are also creating the power dynamics between them. This responsibility we have as designers or creatives should not be taken faintly, and we should consciously ask ourselves questions.

We often see minority groups being side-lined when it comes to representation, and certain stereotypes being made the focus of drawings. Asking ourselves what types of people these may be, and keeping a critical lens on our own work will help us evolve and grow into more inclusive visualisers.



### 4. Power in Placement: *who has the power?*



This visual has a good mix of skin tones and suggested ethnicity. That said, there is power in where people are positioned.

*Let's review this visualisation...*

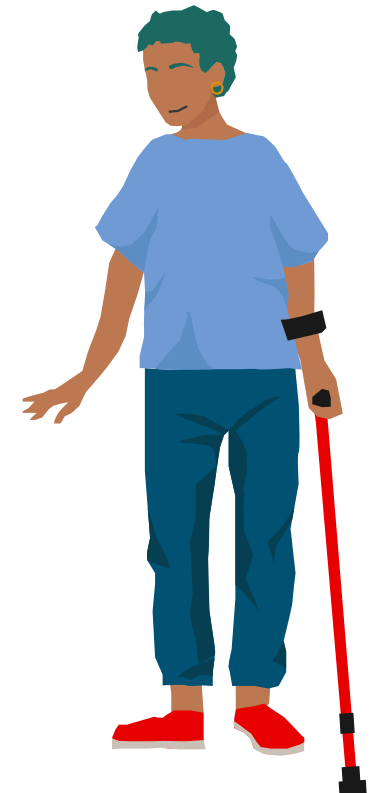




## 4. Power in Placement: *who has the power?*



*Although this visualisation illustrates a diverse and considered community in terms of demographic and circumstance, emphasis is placed on the least diverse and inclusive part of the visualisation.*

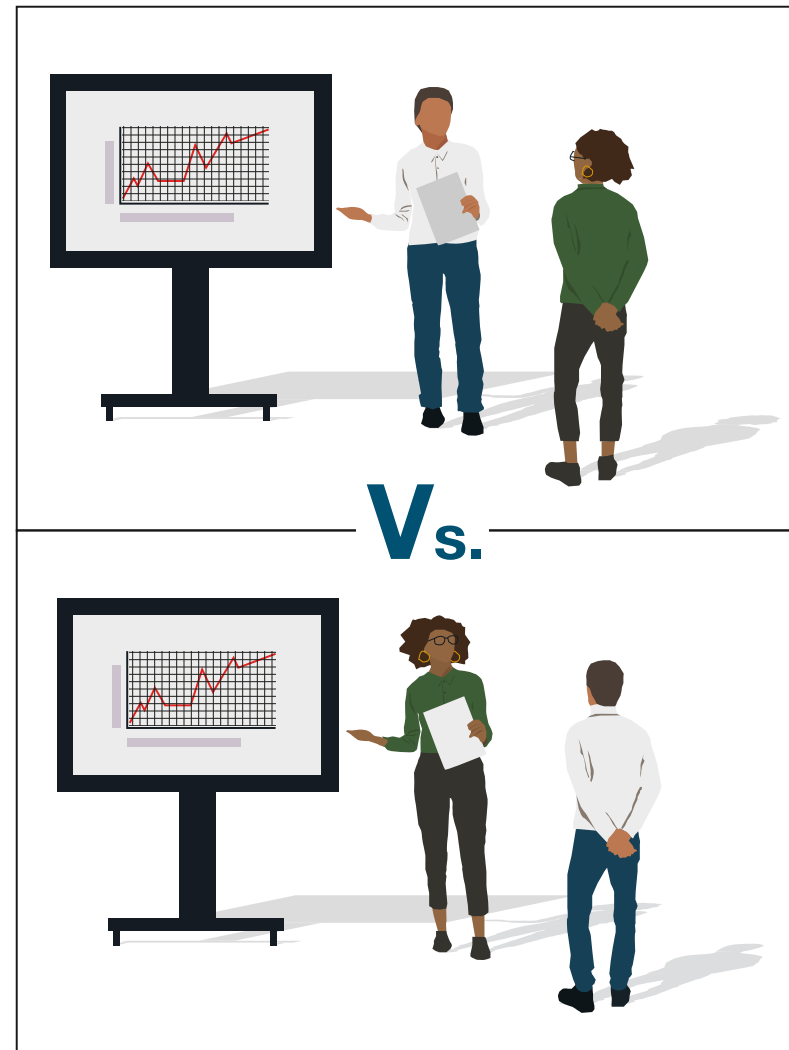


## 4. Power in Role: *who has the power?*

If a level of hierarchy is necessary to communicate a concept or situation within an visualisation, use the opportunity to represent diversity in social structures.

Both of the illustrations here show a balance of diversity, but the image at the top conveys an unbalanced power dynamic where an implied white male businessman presents information to a passive implied woman of colour.

In the bottom image the narrative is flipped and swapped the person of colour into the position of higher authority.



## 5. Check and Challenge

Drawing and creating a truly diverse and inclusive image is not a one time process, but an ongoing process that requires creatives to constantly reflect and improve.

**Sharing work with others** helps to recognise patterns in your work that you may otherwise miss. When reviewing on a drawing or visualisation, start by asking:

- ? Does this embrace a range of ethnicities, cultures and perspectives?
- ? Do the visualisations feel genuine and trustworthy?
- ? Are the visualisations or graphics biased to my own experience and background?
- ? Will this exclude or offend someone?
- ? Does this promote existing stereotypes or challenge them?
- ? Am I encouraging a better, more inclusive vision of the future?



*Take a step  
back and check  
the visualisation*





This is quite a simple street scene. Consideration for demographics in the neighbourhood have been reviewed and people from a range of ethnicities, gender and age groups have been represented.

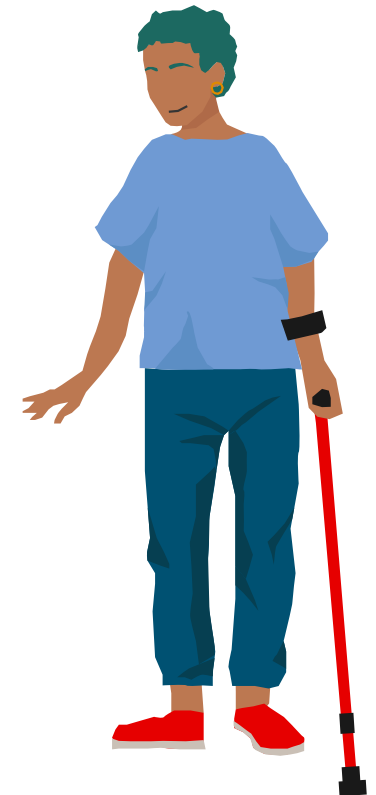
However, there are a few opportunities that have some potential to be challenged.

*Lets put the guidelines into practice by making minimal changes to an existing visualisation...*





There is a woman walking alone pushing a pushchair or stroller - a similar circumstance to the one presented earlier. The elderly man on a mobility scooter is another typical stereotype aimed towards older generations. He is also in a position of power in the visualisation, being very much in the foreground.





The woman pushing the pram has been swapped out for a male caring for a child. A white man sat at the table has been swapped out for what could be interpreted as a woman breastfeeding in a wheelchair. The elderly man in a mobility scooter has been switched for a pair of active older adults.

*Small alterations can make a big difference to making a visualisation feel more inclusive and move away from stereotypical assumptions.*





Vs.



This visualisation may present opportunities to further improve the inclusivity it is illustrating. However, this example aims to demonstrate how just a few simple alterations can make a big difference to the story being told.

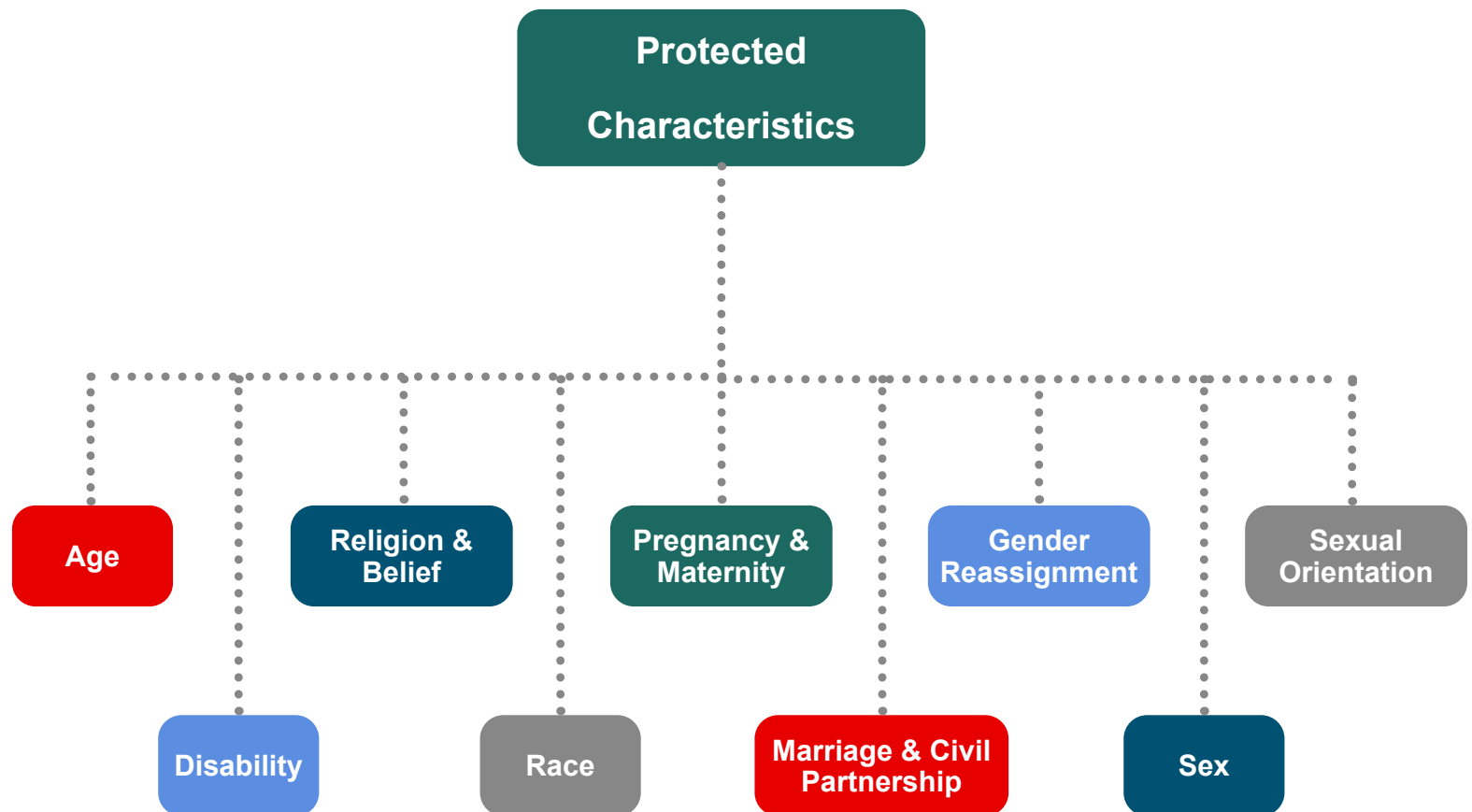
*Through taking these simple steps, we are able to create more diverse and inclusive imagery.*



# Considering the Protected Characteristics

Let's work to recognise our own biases by creating context-appropriate visualisations in contradiction to societal norms, so that we're intentional about depicting a more inclusive visualisation. Considering age, race, height, weight, ability, gender, and religious signifiers should all come into play when we think about who is included in a visualisation.

The presented graphic includes initial considerations to be recognised when using the [Protected Characteristics \(UK\)](#) and [Ontario Human Rights Code \(Canada\)](#) as guidelines to begin to challenge typical stereotypes, and embrace different people and perspectives.



# Considering the Protected Characteristics

## 1. Age

### Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)

- All age groups - new born to older adults
- “Young old and Old old”

### Additional Considerations - How to depict

- Show being active and relaxed
- Show in groups with not only people of same age
- Remember our intersectionality - difference in race, background and appearance

## 2. Disability

### Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)

- Range of visible disabilities
- Persons using mobility devices
- Persons with a service dog and or white cane
- Persons with artificial limbs
- Persons of short stature (consider proportions of head to body)
- Person wearing headphones - subtle reference to person managing sensory environment

### Additional Considerations - How to depict

- Show being active
- Engaged within a group of people without and without visible disabilities
- Intersectionality

# Considering the Protected Characteristics

## 3. Gender Reassignment / Gender Expression

### Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)

- Be mindful of stereotypical roles assigned to genders and consider challenging i.e/ who is offering childcare
- Be mindful of how gender is typically represented - appearance, hairstyle, clothing, body language
- Cisgender representation and non-binary representation
- i.e. feminine body with masculine features (possible short hair), neutral clothing; neutral features and neutral clothing (non-binary); masculine body, masculine features, and feminine clothing

## 4. Pregnancy & Maternity

### Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)

- Show pregnant people, and people breastfeeding

### Additional Considerations - How to depict

- Remember our intersectionality
- Parents with disabilities - either breast feeding or supporting a pregnant parent

# Considering the Protected Characteristics

## 5. Marriage and Civil Partnership

### Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)

- Be mindful of stereotypical roles assigned to genders and consider challenging i.e/ who is offering childcare
- Be mindful of how gender is typically represented - appearance, hairstyle, clothing, body language
- Cisgender representation and non-binary representation
- i.e. feminine body with masculine features (possible short hair), neutral clothing; neutral features and neutral clothing (non-binary); masculine body, masculine features, and feminine clothing

### Additional Considerations - How to depict

- Remember our intersectionality
- Mixed race couples,
- Mixed ability couples,
- A range of body sizes

## 6. Sexual Orientation

### Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)

- See “marriage and civil partnership”

## 7. Sex

### Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)

- See “Pregnancy and maternity”

# Considering the Protected Characteristics

## 8. Race

### Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)

- Show a range of race and colour
- See “Religion and Belief” comments

### Additional Considerations - How to depict

- Remember our intersectionality - consider race and colour are represented through the various equity deserving groups (i.e. columns 1 and 2).

## 9. Religion and Belief

### Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)

- Show people wearing headscarves, turbans, kippahs
- Consider clothing outside western realm e.g. turbans, punjabi kurta pajama, sarees

### Additional Considerations - How to depict

- Show an integrated mix of people wearing a range of clothing from different cultures and religions.
- Remember our intersectionality as it relates to ability, disability, age, etc.



# An Ever-growing Resource

This is a 'living document' that will be reviewed on an ongoing basis. If you have any questions or feedback regarding this document and BDP's approach to creating inclusive and diverse visualisations, please email:

*[bdppeoplelibrary@bdp.com](mailto:bdppeoplelibrary@bdp.com)*

*Thanks for  
stopping by!*



For further information please contact the  
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