

Transcripts from the Imagery Tips for Brands Seeking a Diverse Audience episode:

Our original intention with this episode was to interview a photographer with expertise in inclusive imagery for marketing purposes. And we talked to several, I looked around. I stalked a lot of people on Instagram. I had some conversations and ultimately I couldn't find someone that I felt both comfortable with their credibility on this topic and that they were informed about some of the things that we're gonna talk about today like trauma and how it plays with photography and things like that.

So I decided after a lot of back and forth to do this episode myself for now because I promised you way back at the beginning of season four, that we would only have people on the show where I was a 100% confident that they were doing their work and that they were not going to do any harm around the topics that we were covering. And, I wasn't quite there yet with any of the photographers that I talk to for this episode.

And so I decided instead to share where we are in our journey, when it comes to inclusive photography and inclusive imagery and what we've learnt, what that journey looks like and what we're still very much in progress on. And hopefully as the show gets larger and more people are listening, some of the bigger names in this space might be interested in coming and talking to you. Some of the people that I feel more confident about bringing on to talk to you, but I do wanna say right out the gate, if you are a photographer or knows a photographer who is doing a lot of really cool things around this work please shoot me an email and let me know because I would love to interview them for the show.

So, first I wanna explain my experience with inclusive imagery. So, if you've never looked me up and only heard my voice you may not know, but you probably do that I am a white middle-class cis-gendered heterosexual female. And so, I have a lot of privilege when it comes to some of the issues that we're going to talk about here. I also fit if not perfectly within basically within the standard accepted body type meaning, I am not fat or, I feel different. People feel different ways about that word but I'm not what would be considered fat or obese or something like that.

I don't have any major like major non-traditional things with my face or, or disabilities. I'm able bodied, things like that. And so, I wanna recognize as we have this conversation that some of the things that have been difficult for me are still

pretty privileged. I wanna recognize as we have this conversation that even though I'm gonna tell you some ways where I have struggled with feeling good about photography for our own work, that I am recognizing upfront that I still have tremendous privilege and don't have direct experience with some of the things we're going to talk about.

That said, I have been the marketing coordinator, director, strategist for many people who do not have all the privileges that I do and had to think about how to get the right imagery for their brands and their campaigns. So I do have some experience in this work. I also am not a photographer or a designer myself. Y'all know I come more from the nerdy SEO and copywriting side of things.

So, I wanna say those things up front because I want to be completely clear that we are very much in the work on this issue. That I've learned a lot, and I'm really proud of what we're doing in our own work, but that I am by no means an expert. What I am here today to share with you about imagery is some things that I know from a marketing context that matter in this arena and what we're thinking about so that we can do better digital just like we want you to do.

So, my experience where I really started thinking about inclusive imagery actually started probably six, seven years ago. And that was because I was struggling to get imagery that I felt good about to use for my brand. In a couple of ways. One, I worked with a lot of trades companies and manufacturing companies at that time. And very few of the stock photography resources that were out there had great imagery that fit those type of industries. That really spoke to what it was like and what someone looked like in construction or electrical or on a manufacturing floor. Most of the stock images around those trades because of being very afraid of regulatory issues with images were really very sterile.

And they really didn't speak to what being in that work was actually like. And alongside that, I was also having a really difficult time getting images that I felt good about of my own company, specifically of myself and the people that we worked with. You may notice, if you ever look me up online or you look at one of these videos on YouTube that I have a very round face. At the time that I started doing this stuff, I was would have been characterized as a thin woman. I was like, I don't wanna go into weights but I was like a pretty thin blonde woman but I've always had a really round face.

And I've always had like if you're not looking at this visually, this extra chin stuff going on here that made me feel really awkward and made photography difficult. And, photographers would often tell me that it wasn't that big a deal. I just had to recognize that I wasn't very photogenic. And, I had one friend who was really trying to be helpful once tell me about this issue, not so much in business but in my

personal life. I was going through my divorce and for a brief moment flirting with the idea of trying online dating. This was before the app world. And, I just couldn't seem to connect with anybody who was really at all interesting for me.

And my friend told me, he says, Renia, you have to understand that nothing that is interesting or sexy about you comes across in an image. You're just not photogenic. People have to meet you in person. And even though that wasn't about business I carried that into trying to figure out how to get images for my work that I felt good about. That felt like me, not just of myself, but of my work with my clients, of me on stage, of my clients in their work. And I kept hitting up against this issue of not being able to get imagery that spoke to who I was, who our brand was and who our clients were.

And I wanna be clear that it wasn't just that I was trying to find these things in stock. I couldn't find these things available in a photographer. I paid, 1,000s of dollars several times to have different photographers create this for me and could never quite get there. And that frustration, the pain of not liking the way I looked or the way my clients looked in our photography that stayed with me for several years. Now, luckily I found an amazing photographer who I worked with at a previous company that I was working with who has been able to get imagery that I am proud of for my clients and for me now.

And it taught me a lot about where the disconnect is and where some of the opportunities are. And I still don't feel confident in pictures y'all. I don't feel confident about the way I look that's, you know just part of the stuff that I'm working on with the way this fucked up world is. But, I do feel like our imagery speaks to our brand and speaks to who we are and who we want to serve now because of what I've learned from working with Meryl and Michael's photography.

And, we're gonna talk today about what some of those lessons were and how you can go through them with your brand, because I know many of you because I've gotten your messages and I've talked to you about it are experiencing some of the same things that I am that you just don't feel great about the imagery that's available for you to use. We're also going to give you some resources in the show notes that can help you to solve that issue with stock and to find a photographer that you really love.

So, the first question that I always want people to address before they even start thinking about inclusive imagery or imagery that represents lots of different types of people is, what type of brand are you? What your photography needs to portray, what your images need to portray is going to be very different depending on what type of brand you are. Now, you've heard me talk a lot about like hero's journey and

the story brand framework. So, that is gonna come into play a little bit here but I first want you to think about are you a personal brand or are you a business that's bigger than your own personal self? And let me give you an example of this.

So, are you Oprah? Are you? Oprah is probably the biggest that I can think of off the top of my head of a personal brand. Are you Tony Robbins? Are you? The company is you. Everything that the company does is under the umbrella of you as an individual? Or, are you more of a business? Are you more of a Stonyfield Farms or Bob's Red Mill or something like that? Is the business the point or you and your message?

I see particularly a lot in this online space these businesses that really are bigger than a personal brand drive their. They really drive their entire business visual around pictures of the owner. So, say you're a coaching business and maybe the business operates under your name. Maybe it doesn't. But if all the images on your website. No matter what your capi says. If all the images on your website are only of you, then you are a personal brand. And the connection that you're making with your clients and prospective clients is going to be entirely on your shoulders and about you.

That is a totally legitimate way to go but it's not the only way to go. And, it's not the right visual message to portray if you want your business to be bigger than just you. For example, I don't want my business to be about me. I want my business to be about my clients and about our do better digital message and about our values in the world and about supporting my team. So, it's important that the images that are portrayed on my website are not just me.

And I want you to think of this particularly, if you are a white woman in the world. If you're a white cis-gendered heteronormative, heterosexual, thin able-bodied woman. And I'm sure I said something wrong in that line but I wanna like if the only imagery that you are portraying to the world is pictures of you in your own body. You're automatically going to be closing off and automatically supporting systems of privilege that make it really hard for you to make statements about inclusivity in my opinion.

Now, I'm open to someone arguing with me about this, but I just think that it is not a good message to send to only have pictures of you yourself, all over your services and your website and your Instagram feed. If you really are committed to diversity in your business you need to show other people not just to do better digital but also because remember one of the things that the story brand framework that I love so much talks about is, you are not the hero. You're trying to make your client the hero.

So if the only thing you show is yourself you're putting yourself on a pedestal automatically. You're not creating the type of relationship that is often the most healthy. And I think that lends us to this problem we have in the online space of treating coaches and teachers and things like that, more like celebrities than the service providers that they actually are. So I want you to look at your photography and ask yourself, if you're showing your privilege, just by nature of only using images of yourself and what might it change if you did better about displaying your audience because that's going to make it important and make it clear who you actually know and who is actually in your audience.

And let me give you an example of how this works. When I was first struggling with this issue in my work. I have limited enough resources that I can't afford to hire models, to do a bunch of custom photography for me. And so I was trying to figure out how to get a image library for our own brand that was better than anything I was able to find in stock photography. Not just from the standpoint of inclusivity and diversity, but also from the standpoint of not being so sterile as much stock photography is.

And so what I was able to do after really going back and forth and trying to figure out how I was gonna do this is it clicked for me, oh who do I know? Who is in my client base who might be willing to help me here? Who are my friends who look like the inclusive and diverse picture that I want to portray? So what that means is, am I actually in the world both as a business owner and as an individual as the person I say I want to be and that I am portraying to the world. So what I did is instead of trying to create an image of what my brand was, I looked at, who is actually a part of my brand, and I used that to inform the imagery.

And so, what we did is we got together a group of my actual friends and clients to do photography for our brand. And you're gonna start seeing the result of that. Actually, there's a few pictures on Instagram but you're gonna start seeing the result of that with the rollout of our new website in this month. And, it's really exciting to me because what you will see when you see the group of people that I am connected with both through my work and my personal life together you see that diversity play out naturally. You see people from 22 years old to 60 years old.

You see people of all different races and backgrounds and nationalities and sexual orientations and tattoos versus not tattoos and piercings versus not piercings. And, all of that diversity and inclusive behavior that I say I want my brand to be out about plays out in the photography. And so, I largely don't need to make statements about it constantly in the world because I'm showing you with our brand what we're about. What it also made clear for me was places where I had holes and blind spots. Like, I don't know a lot of people who are not what we would call like normal.

I don't wanna use the word normal, that's not right. Able-bodied people. I don't know a lot of people who have varying abilities. And I realized that I had a blind spot in my work and a blind spot in the way I was showing up in the world that I needed to do work on. And so, I started doing intentional work on that because it was really clear through my imagery where we were diverse and inclusive and where we were not. My values show up in our brand now. And that's what I want for you. And it's impossible to do that in my opinion if the only imagery you're using is just pictures of you where you look glamorous and perfect. It also by using your actual clients and your actual connections, it also helps you avoid things like tokenism.

It helps you avoid just putting one person who looks like the widget you wanna check in your pictures. And, it helps you to understand in your imagery that we're talking about a lot of intersections of diversity here, not just race. We're talking about different body types, different ages, different classes, different ways of dressing, different ways of adorning our bodies. Those will all show up if you use people who are actually in your network and in your community and you're actually showing up in the world in a way that values a diverse type of people in your world.

So, if you're struggling like I was with getting imagery that really works for your brand, you may try, like I did to get imagery based on the community you, that you already have. Now, I'm not gonna go too deep into the problems with stock images and why custom images are better. But I do wanna say from a marketing standpoint, you're more likely to get images that work with your brand. You're more likely to show up in an image search in Google. It's really valuable to have those custom images.

It's really helpful for your brand. So much so that I recommend clients all the time that are on limited budgets spend on photography before they spend on web design or dev. Because I believe that the photography is more important and more useful over time. It's come to the point where we can build websites on our own. We can't usually, unless we are trained photographers get great photography on our own. Now, how do you choose a great photography? Or excuse me, a great photographer? That's the last thing I wanna share with you today. Choosing a photographer, you wanna look for a couple of things. First, you wanna look for empathy.

My experience has been that a lot of dudes particularly young white dudes in photography don't have a lot of empathy for diverse bodies and people with diverse backgrounds. And, they also are often not trauma informed in a way that makes them safe for people who have issues with how their body is showing up in the world. So, we need to consider the bias of the photographer not just our own bias. In

order to get the right type of images. For me, my experience with photographers transformed when I started working with a woman that had experience working with people with diverse backgrounds and had a diverse background of her own that helped us to get better imagery because she saw the world in a more inclusive way than a photographer who'd only ever worked with photogenic models, saw the world.

So, I want you to put some intentionality into choosing your photographer. And if you need help doing that look at the resources section for this episode because we've linked to some lists of photographers that are curated lists. We've linked to some diverse stock photography options and some resource articles on how to choose a photographer. I feel like this issue is really important. And as you can probably tell from this episode, we're still in inquiry about it as a brand.

So, I would love to know how you are thinking about inclusive photography? How you are making sure that your brand represents your message in a bigger way than just sharing pictures of yourself on your Instagram feed. Shoot me an email or DM me and let me know. And we'll, talk to y'all next week.