

Photography Considerations

The photos we capture say more about the photographer than the image. Just as the focalization of a story presents the narrator's perspective, the focalization of an image reflects that of the photographer. Careful consideration for which images we choose to capture and share with the world is part of intercultural learning and developing a more complex appreciation and understanding of cultural differences.

Review the following considerations developed by RADI-AID:

Principle 1: Promote Dignity

You have the responsibility and power to make sure that what you write and post does not deprive the dignity of the people you interact with. Always keep in mind that people are not tourist attractions.

Principle 2: Gain Informed Consent

Informed consent is a key element in responsible portrayal of others on social media and through imagery. Respect other people's privacy and ask for permission if you want to take photos and share them on social media or elsewhere. Avoid taking pictures of people in vulnerable positions. Consent and specific care is needed when taking and sharing photographs of and with children, involving the consent of their parents, caretakers or guardians, while also listening to and respecting the child's voice and right to be heard.

Principle 3: Question Your Intentions

Why do you travel and participate in global learning? Your intentions might affect how you present your experiences and surroundings, for instance, do your images depict the world as "exotic" and "foreign" and why are you making that choice? Ask yourself why you are sharing what you are sharing? Are you the most relevant person in this setting? Good intentions, such as raising awareness of the issues you are seeing, is no excuse to disregard people's privacy or dignity.

Principle 4: Use Your Chance- Bring Down Stereotypes

When you travel you have two choices:

1. Tell your friends, family, colleagues, and the general public a stereotypical story, confirming their assumptions instead of challenging them.

2. Give them nuanced information, talk about complexities, or tell something different than the one-sided story more aligned with the sensationalism of the news media.

Use your chance to tell the stories that are yet to be told. Portray people in ways that can enhance the feeling of solidarity and connection.

For photography, like storytelling and social media sharing, a good guiding principle is “take the lessons, leave the stories” or “capture a memory, leave the imagery.” Capture images that represent friendships, collaborations, shared meaningful moments, and connections to a place and whenever possible bring down stereotypes to work against furthering imagery that creates a single story of a place or a people.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s [“Danger of the Single Story”](#) shows us the power of the storyteller and makes it clear that the storyteller is not the author of the experience. The stories we often tell from global experiences, we are not the authors of and its important to remember, those stories and images are not ours to share (unless whomever is depicted has had the opportunity to review and provide input as to how they are represented and then gives permission for the image or story to be shared).

checklist

before you post on social media:

- ✓ Ask yourself: “What is my intention with sharing this post?”
- ✓ Gain informed consent from the person in the picture and/or the caretaker. If you can’t explain why you are taking photo, find a translator
- ✓ Know the name and background of the people portrayed
- ✓ Offer the person in the photo a copy
- ✓ Avoid sweeping and simplified generalizations, include informative text with names, place, etc.
- ✓ Be respectful of different cultures and traditions
- ✓ Ask yourself: “Would I have appreciated to be portrayed in the same manner?”
- ✓ Avoid sensitive, vulnerable situations and locations such as hospitals and health clinics
- ✓ Don’t portray yourself as the hero in the story conveyed
- ✓ Challenge the perceptions, bring down stereotypes!

Photographers Without Borders Code of Ethics

Photographers Without Borders, a nonprofit organization committed to storytelling, commits to the following [code of ethics](#)[Links to an external site.](#).

1. People, the land, the water—all the beings—have voices; we share our gifts to amplify them.

With decolonization as one of our core values, we strive to decolonize the storytelling process. Why? Because *nearly every problem we seek to address today was in some way caused by unchecked colonialism and capitalist frameworks.*

Note: Decolonization is a lifelong process of learning, unlearning, and dismantling white supremacy and the systems some of us benefit from or are oppressed by.

2. Co-liberation is the goal.

“Helping” often infers an often unhealthy power dynamic with harm as an unintended result. Instead, we strive towards our co-liberation, moving towards collaboration and allyship.

Note: Being an “ally” is not something we can claim or wear like a badge; it is not a destination we arrive at; instead it is something that is earned through showing up in a collaborative way.

3. “Right relationship” creates a safe container for the work to be held.

We strive to be in right relationship with our collaborators because it reduces the possibility of harm and increases the possibility of collective upliftment.

Right relationship involves recognizing the interconnectedness of all things, and therefore committing to standing in reciprocity, accountability, integrity, respect and understanding.

4. Maintain integrity and accountability throughout the process.

We strive to maintain integrity of the image and story, and to maintain accountability by checking in with our collaborators before, during and after the editing process (photos and contextual descriptions).

We realize it is important to be aware of our own positionality and privilege so that we can actively avoid: stereotypes; “white savior”/ colonial/ centering/ oppressive narratives; shaming; cultural appropriation; anti-Blackness; cultural fetishism/ exoticism/ romanticism; etc.

5. Fluid, free, prior and informed consent.

We strive to do no harm to anyone directly or indirectly (mental, physical or emotional).

We strive to maintain a continuous feedback loop, obtaining explicit consent in advance, especially for photographing the likeness of equity-seeking peoples, children and other non-consenting individuals, or in cases where one is benefiting financially.

We remember that consent is fluid and should be accurately informed.

6. Follow community protocols.

The process of documenting stories is just as important as the story itself. All communities have different protocols that must be understood and accepted before engaging.

We give or accept gifts if it is culturally-appropriate or relationship-based. We do not accept compensation, favors or gifts *that might influence the outcome* of the project, and do not make promises we can't keep.

7. No selfies or photographs with wildlife.

The harm clearly outweighs the benefits of encouraging close contact with wild beings (even in captivity) for several reasons, including but not limited to: zoonotic disease transfer; encourages more exploitative sanctuaries and zoos to proliferate; promotes wildlife trafficking; devalues the most important goal of keeping these beings in their natural habitat.

The values and narratives we promote or don't promote make a difference.

After reviewing the Photographers Without Borders's code of ethics, what is *your* photography code of ethics?

Conclusion

We hope that these considerations invite you to develop awareness of how photos reflect the intercultural understanding of the photographer and how imagery shapes intercultural experiences. Have the readings or considerations presented on this page led you to think of visual imagery in relation to global learning and travel differently?

By learning to look closely at the pictures we take, we can gain insight into our preconceived notions, assumptions, biases and the focalization in which we see the

world. Look back over some of your recent travel photos. How are they different from photos you've taken of and with your close friends and family?

We challenge you to be intentional with what photos you choose to take abroad. Ask yourself, am I promoting dignity or am I reproducing stereotypes?

Citations

Checklist before you post on social media. RADI-AID.

(n.d.) <https://www.radiaid.com/social-media-guide/#checklist>Links to an external site.

Code of ethics. Photographers Without Borders.

(n.d.) <https://www.photographerswithoutborders.org/code-of-ethics>Links to an external site.

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Miller-Idriss, C., Friedman, J.Z. & Auerbach, J. Jumping, horizon gazing, and arms wide: marketing imagery and the meaning of study abroad in the USA. *High Educ* 78, 1091–1107 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00390-8>Links to an external site.

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