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Resources @ EJP

GUIDELINES FOR REPRESENTING STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRISON

Imagery is a powerful tool that carries with it enormous responsibility. Incarcerated individuals shoulder the burden of too many negative stereotypes. EJP students have prepared this set of guidelines to assist those with responsibility for representing students enrolled in higher education programs in prison. We hope that it will assist you in becoming more deliberate and critical of your visual choices.

The nine guidelines are meant to help you select photos for use in newspaper stories, brochures, websites, and the like. Even more fundamentally, they're offered in the hope they'll prompt you to consider more generally the political uses of images, and how you can use them strategically to serve a compassionate and hopeful agenda. We suggest sharing them with your current or former students, and using them as a basis for developing your own guidelines, which will reflect the particular concerns and culture of your region and your program.

No matter the precise guidelines you end up following, we think it's important to note that not every photo will meet each of the nine guidelines. There is no perfect photo, and for that reason we suggest that, to the extent possible, you show always use a range of images instead of just one. The guidelines are not inviolable. At times, you may decide break them, to make a point or for strategic reasons.

Why does this matter? A well-chosen set of images of higher education in prison programming in action can prompt viewers to question what they believe they know about prison and incarcerated individuals. This sort of questioning, on a large scale, can shift the narrative around incarceration.

Finally, we hope that these guidelines will prompt those engaged in higher education in prison to reflect on what you're photographing in the first place. What sorts of activities take place within your program? Do they allow for a full expression of emotions, and provide opportunity for students to create, teach, or explore? We believe that critical, engaged pedagogy best promotes learning and respects the humanity of students. Our guidelines favor images that illustrate such learning environments.

1. Honor situational integrity

Photos should depict the activity in question—e.g. a shot of men working out shouldn't be used to illustrate college-in-prison. Photos should fairly represent the program in terms of demographics (e.g. race of students), the environment (photograph students actual classrooms and not other prison spaces), and the mood or spirit of the program.

2. Show active mode

Show students creating, building, talking, thinking, discussing, questioning, investigating, writing, teaching, and debating. Debunk stereotypes of people in prison being passive recipients of knowledge

3. Show human expressions

We prefer photos that depict students in a range of human expressions, thus emphasizing their individuality and humanity. "Negative" emotions such as sorrow and frustration are OK.



4. Don't replicate the gaze

Photos by their nature intrude upon their subjects. You can be careful, though, not to replicate the gaze of carceral surveillance. Avoid objectifying the students in your photo. Shots taken from a high vantage point can recall security cameras, and leave an impression that students are dangerous people that need to be watched closely.

5. Challenge stereotypes

We suggest you get into the habit of asking yourself, “what sort of narrative does this picture support?” Choose photos that undermine popular beliefs about people in prison being aggressive (men), docile (women), or beaten-down-by-life.

6. Document “prison aesthetics” selectively

Items such as shackles, handcuffs, and bars may not have a place in a story about education in prison. Their presence in a photo can suggest to viewers that students are dangerous and need to be controlled. Before including them in a photo, ask yourself what role they serve and whether they feed into stereotypes.

7. Caption.

It's always best practices to acknowledge the photographer and the date the photo was taken. We encourage you to go even further. Allow your viewer to learn more about prison conditions by providing more information about how the photo was taken and made available. Did a correctional officer take it? Was it reviewed and approved by internal affairs? Explain in a caption or in the body of the text what was happening in the photo—what class was it? Where did it take place? If possible, include names of those in the photo. (If the photo will be online, this can help family members to locate it.)

8. Stage where necessary

In some prisons it may not be possible to take photos. Or, perhaps you can use a camera, but not in the classrooms. When absolutely necessary, we think it's OK to stage photos. Indicate in the caption what liberties you've taken, and why. Sometimes a staged photo can be used to make a strategic point.

9. Consider a wider lens

Pan out, literally and figuratively, to better contextualize the environment in which your program takes place. Sometimes you can help your viewer understand the bigger picture by including posters on the walls, a correctional officer's shoe in the corner, or words on the chalk board. concerns and culture of your region and your program.

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