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Power Dynamics

Power dynamics are the ability to influence or control others through an inequality of power, particularly around issues of race, gender, class, etc.

- The camera acts as a fulcrum – a central point across which power dynamics are leveraged.
- The photographer stands in a position of power in relation to the subjects and face ethical choices in creating their images.
- The national and international FETP staff who help to carry out the epidemiological work / create images also hold positions of power.
Compositional Power

• Power and individual agency exist on both sides of the camera

• This is reflected through:
  • Angle of the photograph
  • Active vs. Passive Subjects
  • Position relative to other subjects
  • Position relative to the camera / viewer

• The visualization of power dynamics have the ability to show empowerment, agency, and equitable interaction, but also to disempower subjects through forms of objectification.
Power and Angle: From Below
From similar heights
From above
Power and Active vs. Passive Subjects

• ACTIVE subjects show agency and the ability to engage in and shape the world around them. Action is preferable to passivity in most photographic cases.

• PASSIVE subjects become objects. This object-like-ness makes objectification simple from the viewer’s point of view. Often such images are not necessarily representative of the overarching situation in which these individuals exist.
Subject Ability, Race, Class, Gender, Sexuality, etc.

Ethics inform photographs that show equity of choice and action between both epidemiological teams and the populations they treat. Race, class, nationality, ability, and gender of those in the image and the photographer can impact the image and the power within it, especially when teams are interacting with a population of individuals who may be different in one way or another from themselves.
Subject Position Relative to One Another
Taking anonymous photographs

There may be times when photographing that taking an anonymous photograph may be the most ethical response to the situation. Possible reasons that an anonymous photo might be the best bet:

- Medical / health conditions and the related potential of stigma
- Sensitive topics
  - Sexual violence, stigmatized diseases, etc.
- Possible discrimination in home, work, community, program
- Political (national, community, family) concerns
- Desire of the subject to not have identifiable information shown for any reason
- Simply because the subject does not want to be identified
Silhouette
Photographing (with consent) from behind
Zoom in beyond recognizable features
Focus on relevant body parts & details
Life’s artifacts & landscapes

People’s things, homes, desks, kitchens, drawings, cooking areas, fields, offices, routes through towns etc., provide ample photographic information that tell us about their lives often without them being a visible part of it.
Power Dynamics: A Summary

• Ethics requests that the photographer work to maintain a subject’s dignity and agency while taking a responsible and agentive photograph.

• Knowledge of the power dynamics implicit in photography and how to avoid certain forms of representation can increase the quality of photography and the ethics behind it.
Up Next: Ethical Image Editing