

Ethical implications of image manipulation



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There are many arguments both for and against image manipulation in the media by the public. Groups argue that image manipulation contributes to eating disorders in both women and men and a general decline in self-worth. But opposing views suggest that image manipulation is a necessity for the upkeep of our idyllic view of celebrity culture, or is a form of art. Through my research, I will look at literature that may suggest that the use of image manipulation is negatively affecting our views of society and, in turn, what positive effects it is having too.

When speaking about image manipulation, we need to think of the ethics involved. In a post about the ethics of image manipulation, Lodriguss says; “When we correct, manipulate and enhance images in Photoshop, we must deal with questions of both ethics and aesthetics.” (Lodriguss, 2006) What is ethical and what is not in terms of image manipulation? In what way are we manipulating the images, and is this for good or bad? There are a whole host of questions that can be asked, but we must focus our attention on whom the editing is affecting. When an image is edited, we are looking at two possible audiences who could be affected by the image; the subject and the people viewing the image. These two parties’ will each have different views about the editing that means the moral implications become entwined.

When a reader picks up a magazine, looks at a billboard advertisement of a celebrity’s latest perfume release, or a fashion shoot, their view of the subject is most likely skewed. The editors of these publications often embrace imaging software and it’s editing features to better engage their target audience, and also to assist celebrities in keeping up their ‘ perfect’ image. Lucy Danziger, editor-in-chief of Self Magazine, has been quoted

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saying “ Yes, of course we do post-production corrections on our images. Photoshopping is an industry standard”. (The Daily Mail, 2012) This was said about an image of Kelly Clarkson that was heavily altered. It may be seen by some that the editing of the image is ethically correct as it is maintaining a positive image of the artist. We have to remember that looks sell and in the dog eat dog world that is celebrity culture, does the digital world offer a safe haven for those who may need those few extra pounds shaved off?

We have seen a strong example of how digital manipulation can help those that are being edited, but what about the audience that view and interpret the images? It is quite apparent that the editors of the media publications have an agenda when it comes to image manipulation. Maximising profit. A general understanding is that the public want to see the glam and glitz that comes with the size zero celeb. It’s a form of escapism in the sense that the decoders may look at a magazine front cover and get lost in it’s world of designer gear and pocket sized pooches’. But that escape from reality is short-lived, and the effects of over exposure from these edited images can be devastating.

Young girls are exposed to between 400 and 600 media images per day. (Hawkins, 2012) With such a high figure, is it any wonder that there has been an outcry from charities, that support those affected by eating disorders, to ban excessive photo manipulation? The BBC say that “ the media is a powerful influence and we know how vulnerable some people at risk of eating disorders can be to its visual images in particular” in a quote from Susan Ringwood of B-Eat. (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2010) Charities are getting angry that the media is allowed to ‘ digitally diet’ celebrities with <https://assignbuster.com/ethical-implications-of-image-manipulation/>

no form of ethical guidelines that they must adhere to. However change may be on the horizon. The government are currently looking at reducing the amount of editing that institutions are allowed to put out into the mainstream public. " They [...] want to keep computer enhancement and digital manipulation to an absolute minimum (eg red eye reduction, background lightening)." (Herrin, 2011) The government have seen that the stream of unrealistic photos that plague the media is affecting the way some people view themselves, which is therefore having an effect on their own wellbeing. By creating an ethical code that institutions have to follow, they will be taking one step to safeguarding those at risk of influence.

Early this year, a young 14-year-old girl named Julia Bluhm from Maine, USA, started a petition on the Internet to try and get teenage magazine 'Seventeen' to print unedited photos of women once a month. Julia didn't think that she would get nearly the amount of signatures that she did, totalling up a staggering 84, 000. This figure effectively illustrates how many young females believe that image manipulation has a negative influence on the youth of today. The magazine " promises not to doctor girls' body shapes or face shapes" (Dieken, 2012) which means that it won't be reducing the waist size or the complexion of the young girls. Girls will now be able to read a magazine with accurate representations of their peers, even if it is only once a month. This was seen as a massive breakthrough in the media industry, with " her crusade [leading] to a magazine's commitment to change". (The Daily Mail, 2012)

I believe that both the encoder and the decoder of media texts have valid arguments when it comes to the ethics of image manipulation. I think that <https://assignbuster.com/ethical-implications-of-image-manipulation/>

the celebrity culture demands that those in the spotlight look their very best at all possible times, and the media make a positive contribution to that image remaining so. I do however believe that the repercussions of this editing take an over arching negative effect on those who view them. Young women should not have to be subjected to a bombardment of ultra skinny, perfect representations of women. If those images were mediated by the institutions to a set code of ethics, I believe that the representations of women and the ramifications would be much less negative and tarnished.