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A Survey of Magazine Professionals' Practices and Attitudes Toward Ethical Standards for Photographs

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Abstract

A survey of magazine professionals found fewer than four in 10 respondents would alter or enhance an image to improve its readability. Circulation, size and magazine type predicted whether respondents would enhance photographs. However, despite the declines in media credibility and the expectation among readers that publications would indicate when a photograph has been doctored, few supported the use of *photation* marks, marks similar to quotation marks, to indicate that a photograph has not been doctored beyond minimal standards. Most of the respondents preferred either to use the term "photo-illustration" or to give no indication of any kind.

Introduction

Among the many factors influencing the recent well-documented slide in public trust in the media has been the increased plasticity of photographs made possible by computer editing programs such as Adobe Photoshop. A recent issue of *Sports Illustrated* featured a photo of soccer player Mia Hamm. The photograph shows Hamm in mid-air jumping over a Swedish defender in the 2003 Women's World Cup. When the photo ran in the magazine, a third player had been digitally erased, presumably to improve the composition (Lemorie, 2003). The unsettled nature of photo editing practices has also been driven home recently by the wide variety of responses taken by editors when they publish potentially disturbing images from events of the war on terrorism. For example, a photo taken by *El Pais* photographer Pablo Torres Guerrero of rescue workers and victims at the site of the Madrid bombing included a body part in the foreground. Some editors ran the photo as is, but many

others either removed or edited out the body part, usually without notifying the reader.[1] Similarly, the war in Iraq produces almost weekly still and moving images that challenge editors to balance taste with the public's right to know and to confront standards regarding digital enhancement.

Research on digital enhancement or alteration of photographs has primarily focused on public perceptions. Comparatively little research has been done on the attitudes and work environment of those editors who make decisions about the presentation of photographs. While there is still much to learn about reader responses and assumptions regarding photographs, particularly in one of the most photo-driven media, magazines, this study probes the ethical practices and attitudes of the magazine professionals who decide what happens to photographic images as they move from the camera to the page, and how these editors choose to inform the reader about that process. More specifically, this study surveys members of the American Society of Magazine Editors (ASME)—the magazine industry's leading association, which annually presents the National Magazine Awards (the magazine equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize)—to determine the ethical standards they employ when dealing with images as well as how they prefer to inform readers about the presence or absence of digital enhancement or alteration. In addition, this study explores whether organizational characteristics and personal characteristics affect workers' ethical standards toward image enhancement and alteration. In short, the territory visited by this paper is of both theoretical significance and immediate practical concern for working journalists.

Ethics of Photography

As S. Fosdick and Fahmy (2003) pointed out, the ethics of photography need not be divorced from the ethics of text. Greer and Gosen (2002) established that just as readers are tolerant of text editing, they tolerate minor levels of photographic editing such as dodging and burning.

The idea that photography is every bit as much a language as is verbal communication was first offered half a century ago. In the 1940s, Gyorgy Kepes (in *The Language of Vision,* 1944) and John R. Whiting (in *Photography is a Language*, 1946) laid the groundwork for Tannenbaum and J. Fosdick (1960) and J. Fosdick (1963) to begin to parse the grammar of photography, comparing specific elements of photography—"camera angle, light contrast, number of lights, background tone, and print density"—to other codified languages.[2]

Early in its history, photography was thought to have one big advantage over written language: as a mechanically produced mirror of reality, it was supposedly immune to dishonest manipulation. Of course, we now understand that the mirror is inherently and often intentionally warped, and has been from the beginning. Multiple exposures, dodging and burning have been open to use and misuse from the start. As standard practice, techniques such as cropping, dodging and burning have been accepted (Martin, 1991; Reaves, 1987, 1991). Media professionals routinely correct for color imperfections that creep into images due to artificial lighting sources and imperfect equipment, such that the final printed image bears a closer resemblance to the initial scene than did the image that emerged from the camera.

With the advent of digital photography and photo-editing software, there was a marked increase in both the ability to manipulate and the ability to do so without *appearing* to do so. In other words, it became easier to lie convincingly. This use of digital technology raises core ethical questions of truth and the potential loss of public trust in visual media (Lester, 1991; Martin, 1991; Gladney & Ehrlich, 1996). Gladney and Ehrlich (1996) suggest digital image manipulation should be added to the list of "ethical pitfalls" (p. 506).

Nevertheless, some research points to the benefits of digital imaging technology. Reaves (1991) found editors value digital editing capabilities, such as correcting and assuring color quality and removing cosmetic flaws. Fahmy and Smith (2003) noted the new technology saves time and allows the photographer to delete unsuitable images on location, and to remain on location only as long as is necessary to complete the assignment; it also enhances the possibility of cooperation among photographers and photo editors. Their results suggest photographers would become more aware of what their images show, as they consult with photo editors.

But it is the potential for misuse that spurred most of the academic literature on the subject in the past decade. Studies suggest news professionals are concerned that while photojournalism seeks to represent reality, photojournalists are increasingly working with a technology that effortlessly accommodates the distortion of reality (Reaves, 1987). In other words, with photo-manipulation easier, faster and traceless, some fear that media professionals will become increasingly tempted to manipulate images and that alterations are more likely to transgress bounds of ethical behavior (Gladney & Ehrlich, 1996).

There is evidence that misuse of digital capabilities by some erodes the power of photography everywhere. The central question in the literature has been where to draw the line. In other words, where does enhancement end and deception begin?

Ethical Standards and Credibility of Photographs

The literature on digital image manipulation stresses that if the alteration in a photograph changes elements as originally seen in the camera's viewfinder, and if this alteration violates public trust, then a photo has been unethically manipulated (Davis, 1992; Gladney & Erlich, 1996; Wheeler & Gleason, 1995). In other words, seamless alteration that goes beyond the commonly understood, such as airbrushing of glamour photos, is considered unethical (Wheeler & Gleason, 1995).

The literature shows public confidence in the media declined precipitously in the 1990s[3] and researchers found that increasing levels of digital alteration led to lower credibility for photographs (Greer & Gosen, 2002). Studies have shown older individuals trusted the media less and higher income individuals viewed photographs as less real and the media as less credible (Greer & Gosen, 2002).

While media professionals have come under increasing attack from the public about their ethical stances, there is little evidence that ethical positions have shifted considerably in recent decades. Gladney and Ehrlich (1996) found media professionals see subtle manipulations (such

as manipulating colors and matching size to scale) as purely technical concerns that the audience would not object to.

Huang (2001) studied the degree of trust readers have of digital images in documentary contexts, finding that they expect the media to let them know if a digitally altered image is used, but also finding that "so far, few magazines or newspapers have used a sign or symbol to indicate that an altered image was used in a documentary context" (p. 179). Huang suggested that the media should consider stepping up the degree to which they inform readers that images have been digitally altered, based on his finding that awareness plays a part in acceptance of digital-imaging alterations.

Factors Influencing Ethical Decisions on Photo Manipulation

Past studies found presentational context to be key in digital manipulation of photographs. Interviewing magazine editors, Reaves (1991) concluded that digital alteration depends largely on the editorial profile of the magazine. Magazine editors reported feature and cover photographs are more justifiably manipulated than news photographs (Reaves, 1991).

In a later study, Reaves (1995) surveyed visual editors and found while they were more tolerant of altering soft-news photographs, they were intolerant of digitally altering spot-news photographs. She found a continuum emerged showing editors being the least tolerant of a particular computer alteration in a "spot news photo," more tolerant of the same alteration in a "feature photo," and the most tolerant of the same alteration in a "photo illustration." Reaves concluded that the categorization of photo types could predict when newspaper editors are more willing to allow digital manipulation of a photograph.

Similarly, Davis (1992) found some newspapers have separate rules for different types of photographs, for example allowing only the manipulation of feature photographs that make no claim to represent reality. The rationale is that news professionals, unlike artists, perceive that news photographs have a goal of mirroring reality (Gladney & Ehrlich, 1996). While digitally altering an image could be morally wrong for the news professional, it may not be for the artist (Martin, 1991). In sum, past literature suggests what counts as standard practice and what counts as manipulation depends on the presentational context (Martin, 1991). Variations in presentational context should be taken into account when analyzing the results of the current survey of ASME members, because ASME includes a wide variety of magazine types, from hard news to shelter and fashion.

Also relevant to this study are the influences of other organizational characteristics. Both the size of the media organization and the type of organizational structure influence professionals' ethical judgments (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996). For example, Lowrey (2003) found that larger organizations are both more likely to manipulate photographs and more likely to have rules prohibiting manipulation. Weaver and Wilhoit (1986) also found in their 1982-1983 study that size of the newspaper was a major predictor of ethics, with those from smaller news organizations being less likely to support controversial reporting practices. However, in their 1992 study, size of the organization failed to predict news judgment (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996). They found that while media observers may lament the decline of the independent newspaper,

believing such papers may more aggressively pursue stories, those working for publicly traded, corporate media were more tolerant of liberal newsgathering practices (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996).

Regarding personal characteristics, Reaves (1992/1993) found journalism experience, computer knowledge, education, and age had an impact on attitudes toward digital manipulation. Her results showed editors with photography experience and those familiar with computer technology were less tolerant of digital manipulation than those editors with less photography experience and those who were less familiar with computer technology. Reaves also found editors with a college and/or graduate degree were less tolerant of digital alterations than those editors without a college degree and editors who were 35 years or younger were somewhat less tolerant of digital alteration.

Researchers are split whether gender influences ethical judgments. Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) for example, found no significant differences in either of their studies of American journalists. However, Pritchard (1993) found that men were more likely than women to support controversial newsgathering practices.

Letting the Audience Know

Past research suggests some news professionals support the notion of informing the audience when images have been manipulated (Boyle, 1992). Davis (1992) reported that the Associated Press Managing Editors association (APME) stated that a disclaimer caption should be made available when a photograph has been altered. However, despite the well-documented advance in digital imaging technology and the decline in media credibility, some studies show media professionals are less concerned about the issue.

For example, a study by Black, Steele and Barney (1995) found some media professionals do not welcome the idea that if a photograph has been manipulated, the audience should be informed of the fact. Similarly, in a 2003 qualitative study of leading magazine editors, S. Fosdick and Fahmy (2003) found that the editors saw little need to change or make more apparent the way readers were informed of the level of digital enhancement; there was no support for the idea of *photation* marks, which would function in the same way as quotation marks by indicating that a photo was a direct representation of reality. Most magazine editors were content with the established practice of noting in or near the caption when a photo had been altered beyond the usual standard; it was left for the reader to understand that lacking any such notation, documentary-style photographs were to be read as largely untampered with. The authors argued that this system might work to the disadvantage of the most extraordinary images: Readers might look at the photograph, assume it had been altered, scan the caption looking for the words "photo illustration," and then, not finding those words, look at the photo a second time with new appreciation. But the opportunity to astound the reader would have been lost: one can only look at a photo for the first time *once.* The authors wondered if editors at less established publications would feel the same way as editors whose credibility might be considered beyond question.

Based on the past literature, a survey of magazine editors was administered to test four research questions:

RQ1: What are the current ethical standards employed by magazine professionals when dealing with images?

RQ2: Do magazine characteristics (such as magazine type, circulation, size of editorial staff, the year the magazine was founded and whether or not it has a code of ethics) affect magazine professionals' ethical standards towards image enhancement/alteration?

RQ3: Do personal characteristics and background of magazine professionals (such as age, gender, race, education, income and professional experience and how often he or she consults the magazine's code of ethics) affect ethical standards towards image enhancement/alteration?

RQ4: How do magazine professionals prefer to inform readers about the presence or absence of digital enhancement or alteration?

Methodology

A survey was conducted of members of ASME, the leading association of magazine editors. It is magazines that are often on the front lines of the debate over digital manipulation; and it is magazine editors who make the day-to-day decisions about the selection and identification of photographs.

The survey period was September 5 through September 30, 2003. Personalized e-mails were sent to all 822 members of the magazine association. Up to three follow-up e-mails were sent to non-respondents. The personalized e-mails directed respondents to a web-based questionnaire. Attempts were made to track down individuals who had moved, or replacements of individuals no longer working at the address were used.[4]

Overall it is estimated that 93 percent of ASME members were contacted -- 765 e-mails were delivered successfully. A total of 210 magazine editors responded to our survey. Approximately 27.5 percent of ASME members contacted completed the questionnaire by the end of the survey period. This was an acceptable rate given that the response rate of online surveys range between 15 percent and 29 percent (Comley, 2000).

The web-based survey method was appropriate for this study given that past research has found that in terms of response rates and costs web-based surveys have significant advantages over mail surveys (Cobangoglu, Warde & Moreo, 2001). The literature suggests response rates of mail surveys have been declining (Griffis, Goldsby & Cooper, 2003). For example, Cobangoglu, Warde & Moreo (2001) reported on average the response rate for mail surveys was 26.27 percent.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire included several questions dealing with magazine professionals' attitudes and perceptions regarding ethical standards for images. Respondents were asked whether they enhance/alter images to improve readability and visual clarity. Response categories were: "Regularly," "Often," "Occasionally," "Rarely," or "Never."

One series of questions asked respondents to what extent they would correct an image for: color; to lighten or darken skin tone; to erase blemishes; to dodge and burn; to eliminate distractions, and to combine images. These questions were measured on an eleven-point scale. Response categories ranged from 0 for "strongly agree" to 10 for "strongly disagree."

Respondents were then shown a mock-up of a magazine page that included an image with *photation* marks (see figure above). They were then asked to what extent they agree or disagree with its potential introduction and use. Response categories were: "Strongly agree," "Agree," "Neutral," "Disagree," and "Strongly disagree."

The question was followed up by a series of statements in which respondents were asked to rate how they feel about a variety of methods for disclosing alteration: *Photation* marks indicating the photograph has not been doctored beyond minimal standards (e.g. color correction), an icon indicating the photograph has not been doctored beyond minimal standards (e.g. color correction), an icon indicating the photograph has been enhanced or altered, the words "photo illustration" appearing next to only those photographs that have been altered or enhanced, and no indication of any kind one way or another, other than the reputation of the publication. These questions were measured on an 11-point scale. Response categories ranged from 0 for "extremely negative" to 10 for "extremely positive."

Other questions used for descriptive and comparison purposes included the respondent's age, gender, race, years of experience, income, job description, and how often he or she consults the magazine's code of ethics. Additional questions focused on organizational characteristics: magazine type, circulation, size of editorial staff, the year the magazine was founded, and whether the magazine has a code of ethics.

Finally, responses were analyzed through descriptive statistics, correlation and regression tests. An index of ethical standards on dealing with images was computed. The index was composed of six measures: Changes in color; lightening or darkening of skin tone; erasing blemishes; dodging in corners; eliminating distractions, and combining images. The Chronbach alpha testing the reliability of the scale was .7.

Findings

Respondents: Demographics & Characteristics

A total of 210 respondents took part in the web-based survey. The vast majority (94%) of the respondents work in editorial and 6% work in art, photography, or business-related positions. About half (52%) work in magazines that were established prior to 1980. The same percentage of respondents, work in magazines with a circulation of 500,000 or more and in magazines with an editorial staff of at least 12. While 40% reported they work in fashion, shelter, or lifestyle magazines, 14% reported they work in business to business or association magazines, 8%

reported they work in sports, recreation or hobby magazines, 7% reported they work in finance or news magazines, 6% reported they work in technology/computer magazines and 23% reported they work in other types of magazines.

Nearly all (96%) of respondents have a bachelor's or a graduate degree. Half of the respondents (50.2%) are aware their magazine has a code of ethics. And while only 10% never consult the code, more than two-thirds (73.3%) of the respondents reported they consult the code at least once a year.

Demographically, males and females were equally represented. The average age was 46 years. In terms of work experience and income, more than two-thirds of the respondents indicated extensive professional experience that ranged from 11 years to more than 20 years (73.8%) and had an income above $75,000 (76%).

Ethical Standards for Images

Regarding the first research question on ethical standards for images, more than one-third of the respondents (38.8%) reported they would alter or enhance an image to improve readability and visual clarity. Only 5% of the respondents reported they would never alter or enhance an image. The mean response was 2.7, corresponding to "rarely." Table 1 ranks and details the results regarding the changes respondents would correct for within an image. The magazine professionals saw few problems with enhancing color (7.15). The respondents moderately supported eliminating visual distractions (5.5), dodging and burning (5.5), and removing blemishes (5.11). However, the respondents showed little support for adjusting skin tone (3.74) or combining images (2.79).

Table 1: Responses to statements regarding the types of changes respondents would be willing to make within a photograph

	Mean	**Std. Deviation**
Color	7.15	3.08
Eliminate distractions	5.50	3.12
Dodge/burn	5.50	3.03
Blemishes	5.11	3.27
Skin tone	3.74	3.74
Combine images	2.79	3.35

(Note: Means are based on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being strongly disagree and 10 being strongly agree)

Relationship between Ethical standards & Organizational & Personal Characteristics

The second research question examined whether magazine characteristics, such as magazine type, circulation, size of editorial staff, the year the organization was founded, and whether it has a code of ethics, affect magazine professionals' ethical standards on dealing with images. As shown in Table 2, magazine type, circulation, and size of editorial staff are significant predictors, as noted by the significant F-value (2.757, p < .05). Our findings suggest the higher the circulation of the magazine and the larger its editorial staff the more likely it is to enhance or alter an image. Magazine professionals working at news or finance magazines reported they were less likely to support image alteration or enhancement than magazine professionals working in all other types of magazine professionals in our survey (See Table 3). The year the organization was founded and whether or not it has a code of ethics do not seem to have an influence on ethical standards.

Table 2
OLS Unstandardized Coefficients for regressing responses on ethical standards dealing with images on selected variables of organizational characteristics (N=210).

Constant	8.466***
Magazine Type	-.186* (-.168)
Circulation	-.204* (-.226)
Editorial staff size	-.342* (-.245)
Year magazine was established	-.227 (-.125)
Presence of a code of ethics	.123 (.029)
R-square	.086
F-Value	2.757*

Standardized coefficients are in ( ).

*p< .05, ***p< .001

Table 3

Magazine professionals' ethical standards on dealing with images in different types of magazines

	Mean	**Std. Deviation**
Fashion Shelter or Lifestyle	5.53	1.83
Sports, recreation or hobby	5.43	2.45
Business to Business or Association	5.32	2.10
Technology/computer	4.79	1.06
Other	4.49	2.42
News or finance	3.64	1.74

(Note: Means are based on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being strongly disagree and 10 being strongly agree)

In a second regression analysis that tested the effects of personal characteristics and background on magazine professionals' ethical standards—Research question 3—the overall model was not significant. Our findings do show two significant associations, however. Respondents' age (-.167, $p<.05$) and income (-.176, $p<.05$) are negatively correlated with questions on ethical standards. Older respondents with higher income are less likely to enhance or alter images than younger respondents with lower income.

The Preferred Method of Informing the Reader

The fourth research question examined the respondents' preferred method of informing the reader that an image has or has not been doctored. Results do not show much support for the introduction of *photation* marks. Table 4 ranks and details the results regarding the respondents' preferred methods of informing people about whether an image has or has not been altered. Data analysis shows that while there is less support for the use of an icon or a *photation* mark (M = 4.69) indicating the photograph has not been doctored beyond minimal standards, there is more support for the use of the words "photo illustration" appearing next to only those photographs that have been altered or enhanced (M = 6.46), or no indication of any kind one way or the another, other than the reputation of the publication (M = 6.27).

Table 4
Responses to statements regarding respondents' preferred method of informing the reader an image has or has not been doctored

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The words "photo illustration" appearing next to only those photograph that have been altered or enhanced.	6.46	3.55
No indication of any kind one way or the another, other than the reputation of the publication	6.27	3.63
An icon indicating the photograph has been enhanced or altered	4.82	3.36
Photation marks indicating the photograph has not been doctored beyond minimal standards	4.69	3.42
An icon indicating the photograph has not been doctored beyond minimal standards	4.40	3.38

(Note: Means are based on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being extremely negative and 10 being extremely positive)

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine current practices and attitudes of magazine professionals involving the ethics of photographic enhancement or alteration. Studies suggest that increasing levels of digital imaging alterations is lowering the credibility for photographs (Greer & Gosen, 2002). The 210 surveyed members of the American Society of Magazine Editors appeared keenly aware of the effects of digitally altering photos on the credibility of their publications. Fewer than four in 10 would alter or enhance an image to improve its readability and clarity. One respondent commented:

> We will alter photos only when it is necessary to make better sense. I have never worked at a magazine or with a colleague that I feel have gone beyond the realm of appropriate editing.

Another respondent reported the enhancement process as follows:

> If an image competes with the words on the page we'll lighten the image. We aren't putting horns on people's heads. Just cleaning up what we have to work with. Often we do this for readability.

Results of our study suggest respondents only favored changing photos to alter color. Other photo alternations typically performed during the darkroom days were only moderately supported: dodging photos and removing blemishes. Few of the respondents supported altering the skin tones of subjects and even fewer support combining images. Our findings are in line with past literature that media professionals find nothing ethically wrong with digitally manipulating colors to achieve a desired hue (Gladney & Ehrlich, 1996). One respondent explained enhancing an image as simply a continuation of the photographic process. The magazine professional wrote:

> Photographers take artistic liberties as they shoot images, adding filters, changing lenses, and angles, etc. and this is considered part of the artistic processes of getting a wonderful picture. Working on the image once it gets into the lab or magazine office could be considered an extension of that creative process.

Data analysis suggests only a few variables predicted whether or not media professionals would alter images. Those from larger and established magazines with larger staffs were more likely to support digital alteration practices. This supports past literature that larger organizations are more likely to manipulate images (Lowrey, 2003). Similarly, Weaver and Wilhoit (1986) found those from smaller news organizations would be less likely to support controversial news practices.

This study is one of the first to advocate that publications use *photation* marks, marks similar to quotation marks, to indicate that a photograph has not been doctored beyond minimal standards. However, the use of *photation* marks received little support from the respondents surveyed.

In support of the use of *photation* marks, one magazine professional explained its use would "empower the reader." Another respondent commented:

> It was once said that a picture doesn't lie, but due to technology, we all know what can be done to alter images. If we support the use of quotations for truth, then we should do the same with visuals.

The limited number of the respondents who welcomed the idea however, were concerned with its implementation. Concerns were focused on readers' comprehension and the setting up of accepted standards for their use. One respondent explained: "*Photation* marks' implementation would need to be guided by a set of parameters widely accepted by publishing professionals." Another respondent was worried whether readers would understand them. The magazine professional reported:

> In theory, I think it's useful to identify photographs, which have been manipulated. Practically, however, I'm certain few, if any, readers would take notice of these marks. Quotation marks are universally understood. *Photation* marks are not, and likely would not be for many generations.

Most of the respondents however, supported using the term "photo illustration" to appear next to photographs that have been altered or enhanced. Many also thought there should be no indication of any kind other than the reputation of the publication. Overall, findings of this study suggest magazine professionals believe *photation* marks are not needed. One respondent wrote:

> It (the use of *photation* marks) does not seem necessary. Too often the kind of alteration or enhancement is simply for clarity or quality. I liken it to leaving the "uh's" and throat clearings out of quotes. Quotes are used in text to indicate when a speaker is speaking. They are necessary for understanding. I do not believe photos require the same "punctuation."

Results also suggest most of the respondents found the *photation* mark idea confusing. One respondent wrote: "Using *photation* marks would tell readers something is up, but not WHAT. It would be confusing as well as indicating an acceptance of altering photo."

These results support the earlier qualitative study by S. Fosdick and Fahmy (2003) that also found little enthusiasm among magazine editors for *photation* marks. In an era where credibility of traditional media is quickly declining (Urban, 1999), it is surprising that few photo editors would support a practice such as including *photation* marks. Readers expect the media to let them know if an image has been digitally altered (Huang, 2001). Simply relying on the reputation of a publication does not appear to be enough. Publications need to use some device, whether it is the words "photo illustration" or the *photation* mark, to help maintain the trust of the readers.

One possible explanation for this reluctance, however, is that media professionals might see the subtle manipulations they routinely perform as purely a technical matter that would be of little concern to the reader (Gladney & Ehrlich, 1996). It might also be that what counts as standard practice and what counts as manipulation depends on the presentational context (See Martin, 1991; Reaves, 1995 ; Davis, 1992). Reaves (1995) explains visual editors assess photographs in categories of soft news and spot news. In other words, it is possible that the use of photographs in different types of magazines (such as news magazines and fashion magazines) dictate not only the degree of photo-alteration professionals are willing to perform, but the degree to which they feel their readers need to be informed about those alterations. One respondent wrote: "This (*photation* mark) might be needed in newsmagazines, where a change to a photo could alter the facts, but on a cover image of, say, a lovely cake, this would have no bearing." This helps explain why respondents from news or finance magazines were less likely to accept alteration. Another respondent commented:

> How we use photos depends on the subject matter. If it were a news photo we would not alter it. If it's a photo of a beautiful glass of wine set up by our photographer and taken to be an abstract representation of an idea, we might crop or adjust the color or do whatever to make it a beautiful representation of that idea. A photo of a war scene is very different from a photo of a fashion model.

Our data show only 7% of the magazine professionals surveyed work in finance or news magazines. In other words, the majority of respondents do not work in the news industry. As

noted earlier, results of this study show magazine type predicted whether or not media professionals would alter images. This finding supports past literature that explains photo-manipulation is more likely when the journalistic norms, such as balanced reporting and the ability to portray news accurately and objectively, are weak (Lowrey, 2003). In view of this, it is important the results of this study be interpreted cautiously. Our findings show limited support of an icon to help maintain visual credibility. In this rapidly developing area, however, replications focusing exclusively on news professionals and news photographs are needed to continue to assess the need for a similar device. Future studies should focus not only on news professionals and news photographs, but also on other types of photography, where digital manipulation is controversial, especially wildlife and natural history photography.

Overall, a few limitations of this study should be noted. The majority of the respondents work in the editorial department that primarily edits words rather than images. It would have been better to survey photo editors, designers and managers who have a hand in such matters. However, because more than two-thirds of the respondents indicated extensive professional experience, they are expected to have participated in the decision-making process of their magazines and thus are more likely to be aware of the current issues related to this study. Further, because it is expensive to join ASME, many of the visual professionals working at publications with limited budgets don't belong to the association. Their opinions, therefore, may have been excluded from this survey.

Finally, the scope of this study could have expanded to include a larger population from different media associations. Reaves (1992, 1993) found magazine editors were more tolerant of digital manipulations than were newspaper picture editors. Comparing and examining further populations using photographs in different presentational contexts would allow more decisive conclusions about the trends observed here. A fruitful area for future research could also include experiments and public opinion surveys looking at precise effects of the ongoing advances in digital imaging technology on credibility of photographs.

Notes

[1] The Poynter Institute created an online Flash presentation comparing published images of this photo. It also ran an article (Irby, 2004) that included comments by editors on their choices.

[2] Quotation is from page two of the abstract for J. Fosdick (1963). For a discussion of the limitation of the idea that photography is a universal language that is not hampered by cultural understanding, see Berger (1972).

[3] A 1996 National Opinion Research Center Poll found that the percentage of those who had a great deal of faith in the press had declined from 18 to 11 percent from 1986 to 1996, and the percentage who expressed some confidence in the press had sank from 72 to 59 percent, see Political Institutions, the Press, and Education Show Big Decline (1997).

[4] After the first attempt, in some cases new e-mails of individuals who had moved and/or names and e-mails of replacements were provided. New e-mails were then forwarded to those new e-mail addresses.

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