

PHOTOGRAPHY IN HOLLYWOOD: IMAGE MANIPULATION IN MODERN ENTERTAINMENT

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ABSTRACT

Photography is one of the few mediums of visual communication. Our current culture is primarily image driven, and we are exposed to imagery in every waking hour of our lives, be it through the newspapers, magazines, televisions and Internet, including our smartphones and tablets. With sophisticated digital editing software such as Adobe Photoshop, the art of manipulating images in today's context is becoming more common, specifically in the entertainment industry. Still, as technology is continuously advancing and has provided the media with such software, is image manipulation diminishing the actual reality of photographs? This paper seeks to reveal updates to the craft of image editing in the context of preserving the integrity of photography. Results prove that all in all, with the momentum of digital alteration in the show business, the use of Photoshop and the manipulation of images are a bigger influence than we think it is.

Keywords: Photography, camera, images, editing, Hollywood, entertainment.

INTRODUCTION:

Photography is one of the few mediums of visual communication. From its very beginning, photography was notable for its versatility (Loughnane, 2015). It is used for a range of purposes – documenting personal events such as weddings and birthdays, commercial use for advertising products or services, creative use in a form of art photography, official use of identification as a way to identify people through passports or medical records, as well as the authenticity of news stories. Our current culture is primarily image driven, and we are exposed to imagery in every waking hour of our lives, be it through the newspapers, magazines, televisions and Internet, including our smartphones and tablets. Nevertheless, photographs in general are said to be one of the powerful sources in garnering attention and providing information to audiences in a quick glance (Loughnane, 2015).

Photography however has lost its innocence numerous decades ago, not long after it was born. In as early as the 1860s, photographs were already being manipulated, only a few years after the first ever photograph was taken. These early image manipulations were mostly done using airbrushes, inks and darkroom techniques, but ever since the 1980s, almost all manipulations were made via the use of computers (Gallivan, 2014). There is no doubt that image manipulation currently plays a big role in photography, advertising and art today. With the development and evolution of high-resolution digital cameras, powerful computers, and highly sophisticated digital editing software such as Adobe Photoshop, the art of manipulating images in today's context is becoming more common, specifically in the entertainment industry. Still, as technology is continuously advancing and has provided the media with such software, is image manipulation diminishing the actual reality of photographs?

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Definition wise, image manipulation is “the art of transforming an image to convey what *the user* wants, rather than what the intended original image may have shown” (Gallivan 2014). There are many reasons as to why people manipulate images. From widely circulated news and fashion magazines, political campaigns or as a creative platform, image manipulation allows the user to present the visual information exactly how he wants it to be (Halbrooks, 2015). However, over the last decade, the use of Adobe Photoshop, particularly in the entertainment industry, has become what many consider to be the most nefarious form of digital editing software for image manipulation (Hofer and Swan, 2005). The advanced technology that has been made accessible to a vast majority of people nowadays has allowed extreme modifications in photographs. Some may call it a form of art, while others see it as a way to alter actual reality. Furthermore, any photographer or editor – professional or otherwise, has the ability to modify, enhance and outright mislead photographs for the fun or morally unacceptable purposes through the use of such software that easily enables image manipulation. Therefore, photographs are manipulated to either impress or deceive the public.

Despite its constant criticism and ongoing debate regarding the negative impacts of it, image manipulation is still widely accepted as an art form (Hofer and Swan, 2005). Image manipulation allows artists to take control of their work, express their inner creativity and let audiences see that the unimaginable is possible. It is also said that image manipulation is “an ever-evolving collaboration between photography and graphic design” (Web Designer Depot, 2009). Most of these professional artists and photographers enjoy having the freedom to use such digital editing tools because of all the obtainable opportunities to make their artwork or photographs look a little better. For instance, graphic designers who work in big advertising firms are responsible in not just promoting the product, but also ensuring the selling product shown is able to capture and captivate the attention of the consumers. Anyone has the ability to digitally alter their photographs, but it requires the right skills, dedication as well as a unique and active imagination for an artist's work to be appreciated as an art form.

The world of the entertainment industry is well known for its excessive use of image manipulation. Whenever a reader picks up a magazine, looks at the billboard advertisement for the celebrity's latest pictorial release, or perhaps a high-end fashion shoot, their view of the subject is most likely skewed. It is said that the reason the editors of their respective publications result to digital imaging software and its editing features is to better engage their particular target audience, and also to assist these celebrities in keeping up their “desired” and “perfect” image that most of society nowadays, especially younger audiences, seem to look up to (Halbrooks, 2015). Moreover, image manipulation is able to give these businesses and publications a creative, dramatic and provocative visual boost that can generate higher sales among their targeted audience. Lucy Danzinger, an editor-in-chief of “Self Magazine”, a women's health magazine, once argued that, “Photoshop is part of an industry standard” (The Daily Mail, 2009). This was said in regards to an image of a celebrity, Kelly Clarkson, which was heavily retouched and has caused major controversy among readers at that point of time.



Source: Kelly Clarkson, “Self Magazine”, Jezebel, 2009

Many people, more commonly women, are unaware of the extent in which most of the images they see in advertisements, magazines and billboards are in actual fact manipulated. According to a survey by One Poll UK, it suggest that many of these survey’s participants still do not fully understand the major alterations that goes on behind computer screens (Edmonstone, 2013). Out of the 2,000 women surveyed, 15% of them, mainly in the age group between 18 to 24 years old, were convinced that the images they see of these celebrities or models accurately portrays what these women look in real life. It also states that about 650 of them struggled with body confidence, reporting, “They are either unconfident to extremely unconfident about their body” (Edmonstone, 2013). This has caused a huge public concern regarding how the result of image manipulation in the entertainment industry is negatively influencing the public, particularly women and younger audiences. Additionally, majority of the youths have now begun turning to various smartphone applications that offer similar digital editing tools to alter and enhance their own photos in order to meet the media created ideals of “perfection”.

Likewise, the whole of the entertainment industry is built on with the idea that whoever is under the spotlight has to look their very best at all possible times, even if it means having to go through digital alteration. In the show business today, women tend to be the target of objectification, and thus are more than likely to go through such outrageous act for industry standard purposes. The media representation of women as extremely thin, meaning much thinner than what is physically possible for the massive majority of the actual population of women out there, sets false standards and reflects societal attitude among the general public (Hofer and Swan, 2005). Editing techniques such as airbrushing and digital enhancement is able give these celebrities an unrealistic bodily form, which sets an illusion of an epitomize flawlessness (Hofer and Swan, 2005). Take a look at an example of a recent digitally altered image of a well-known celebrity, Lady Gaga, shown below.



Source: Lady Gaga, Versace Spring 2014 Campaign, Jezebel, 2014

Jezebel, a feminist blog, posted four untouched photos of the celebrity, one of it shown above, posing for Versace's Spring 2014 campaign, and has disassembled every point where the original photos vary from the final, publicized product. While the editors understandably remove some of Lady Gaga's visible bruises and colour corrected the image to give a darker and glossy feel, we can still see that her makeup and odd-looking wig were digitally added and retouched while her arms appeared slimmer than the original. Lady Gaga, ironically, has been one of those celebrities who had been outspoken about being a role model towards encouraging "a positive body imagery", as stated in her own personal blog, but her own form critiqued recently changed through her partnership with the fashion brand, Versace (Gonzalez, 2014).

On top of that, the perception of an ideal body image has been misrepresented dramatically over time in the entertainment industry. Body imagery is a subjective concept based on one's self observation, while an "ideal" body image refers to the body size determined by one's cultural group, in this case, the showbiz itself (Martin, 2010). For instance, from the 1930s to 1950s, also known as the era of the Golden Age of Hollywood, women were expected to have busty hourglass figures with long legs (Rehab, 2015). Leggy, curvy blondes were exceptionally a pinnacle of attractiveness back then. Movie stars, like the famous Marilyn Monroe, displayed curvier bodies with slim waists. Women were even encouraged not to be skinny in order to be considered desirable among men. This ideal body image that was set back then varies from what is expected of today. Women in the 2000s are barraged with so many various requirements to meet the ideal attractiveness – they should be skinny, but healthy; they should have large breasts, but a flat stomach (Rehab, 2015). In addition, with the rapid growth of mass media, the ideal body image represented in the entertainment industry throughout decade has remained consistently slimmer than that of an average women, demonstrating a nearly impossible ideal for the majority of women out there.

FINDINGS:

The false portrayal of body imagery in the entertainment industry in today's modern era can lead in some people, notably younger audiences, to suffer from eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia. According to the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD), women are more likely to develop an eating disorder than men, because of what is shown in the media (ANAD, 2015). Another study that was conducted by them also revealed that 69% of young American girls who are suffering from an eating disorder reported that the images shown in magazines influenced their idea of a perfect body shape (ANAD, 2015). Moreover, almost all teenagers nowadays are exposed to social media, and therefore the media influence that appear on these social networking sites can be deliberate (Gallivan, 2014). The images and messages that they see online offer powerful cues on how they need to look, what do they need to eat, what they have to buy, in order to "keep up" with the current trend (Strasburger, 2015). With such a high percentage, it's no wonder that there is a huge public outcry for industries and publications to ban excessive image manipulation completely. Truthfully, for teenagers to compare themselves to famous celebrities is considered unavoidable. As such, with how big of an influence the entertainment industry is today through the means of social media, these younger audiences will try numerous unhealthy ways to achieve those ideal bodily proportions that they know are physically impossible to achieve. This negative portrayal of body imagery that is represented in all media forms can lead to some of the younger audiences wanting to emulate their favourite celebrity, which can damagingly impact their health. Still, we live in a media-saturated society, and we do not control the message that goes around. The entertainment industry will somehow continue in being a significantly influential context at emphasizing the importance of being attractive (Strasburger, 2015).

VIDEO ALTERATION:

Digital alteration does not only exist in images, but in videos as well. Digital alteration in movies, known as the "beauty work" in the entertainment industry, has long existed for over a decade now. It is said scientists have already developed a "new kind of image manipulation technology that allows filmmakers to modify the appearance of their actors without resorting to time consuming digital touch ups" (Dickey, 2014). This digital procedure carried out by a couple of skilled digital artists uses a specialized software in the finalized stages of post-production to de-age and enhance actors' faces and body appearance, as shown from the examples below.



Source: Lily James, “Cinderella 2015”, BuzzFeed, 2015

Other forms of digital alteration in movies such as the computer-generated imagery, also known as the CGI, has positively enabled filmmakers to create amazing effects that firstly, would cost too much to produce physically, secondly takes lesser physical space to process, and lastly, in which real life cannot depict what can be created through the use of CGI (Dickey, 2014). Still, depending on the movie’s genre and preferred tone, the use of CGI can either be of help or obstruct the overall look of the whole movie. However, no matter how far digital alteration capabilities in movies have advanced, the unprecedented human element still cannot be replaced.

CONCLUSION:

All in all, with how big of a deal digital alteration is in the show business, the use of Photoshop and the manipulation of images are a bigger influence than we think it is, and will obviously continue to evolve in the next few decades to come. The use of Photoshop and its advance editing tools will of course be much more easier than it is now, and the capability required for its users to manipulate and modify images will continue to be widely available to all masses. Soon, Photoshop will probably be on the smartphones and tablets that can easily enable users to dramatically and realistically alter their images on the go. It is to be believed that there is still a certain repercussion of digital alteration in the mainstream media that users have to be aware of in making sure that it is not arching a deleterious effect to those who are viewing them. Furthermore, it is believed that society’s perspective towards the idea of an ideal beauty is currently changing in today’s modern era, and we are slowly embracing and accepting the fact that we don’t exactly have to be considered “perfect” to be deemed as beautiful, and the media is starting to reflect this change too. Image manipulation overall provide its users exciting ways and unlimited creative options for users to achieve its desired results, but it can also be abused to the point of diminishing the actual reality of images.

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