ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR DIGITAL MANIPULATION OF SPORTS
PHOTOGRAPHY

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By

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR DIGITAL MANIPULATION OF SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY

Abstract

The idea that photos can be manipulated has been around nearly as long as the art itself. In the days of the darkroom photos were burned, dodged, cropped and even spliced together to create a desired image. Today photos are taken digitally and easily manipulated through the use of computer software programs like Adobe Photoshop. This ease of manipulation brings ethical considerations into question more than ever as photographers and photo editors can now manipulated an image in ways that not only change the message of the photo, but can also alter the reality the photo once represented at the time it was taken. This thesis seeks to study the ethical considerations that should be taken by photographers in the world of sports photography. The literature reviewed provides examples of why this research study should be undertaken and why this topic of research should continue to be studied, as the medium will continue to evolve. The study was conducted using in depth interviews of several photographers from both national wire services and local newspapers on both the East and West coasts. The research showed that while ethics is an important factor in the manipulation of sports photographer, more can still be done by photographers, editors and other editorial staff to make sure that the highest of ethical standards are being followed at all times from the moment the image is captured to when the image is published. It is important to note that this study focused solely on editorial photography at both the national and local levels and did not examine the growing use of social media and related mobile apps such as Instagram.
# ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR DIGITAL MANIPULATION OF SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Sports photography is all around us in newspapers and magazines and on the Internet on websites and blogs. Even social media outlets such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook have seen a rise in sports photography as the everyday consumer is now rarely without some sort of device with a camera at a sporting event. What’s also changed drastically in the digital age is the means photographers, both professional and amateur, use to capture these images. Gone are the days of 35mm film cameras with filters on lenses and the push and pull processing of a darkroom in the hopes that an images was captured that had the right light, compelling composition and sharp focus. Now photographers can snap an endless amount of photos in rapid succession as a batter swings, a golfer raises a fist in triumph or a gymnast lands that perfect dismount. And once these feats of human possibility are exhausted, the photographer can examine his or her take on a tiny LCD screen before setting up to capture another photograph if the first try did not yield a desired result. At the end of the day the darkroom has been replaced with computers and post-processing software that offers a myriad of options for the digital manipulation of the image. Everything from enhancing contrast and saturation to wholesale alterations of the photo including but not limited to airbrushing skin, completely cloning out objects or logos and even changing the entire scenery of the photograph to include or exclude a desired or undesired background. Here lies an ethical dilemma within the world of sports photography: how far is too far? At what point does it cease being a photograph of a moment in time and become an altered piece of opinion, propaganda or photo illustration? What ethical considerations must be taken? These are the questions that will be explored and answered with this study.

Importance of the Study

Whether they want to admit it or not, photographers are journalists, especially in this era
of one-man band do it all reporters who seem to perform the tasks of an entire newsroom on a
daily basis. Because photographers have a duty to report what they are seeing before them
through their lens they must adhere to the words of Tribune Company president Jack Fuller who
said “the central purpose of journalism is to tell the truth so that people will have the information
that they need to be sovereign” (as cited by Kovach & Rosentiel, 2007, p. 14). For this reason
photographers have a duty to themselves and the consumers who view their craft to tell the truth
through the ways they post process their work. After all, a photo that is manipulated beyond
simple adjustments of brightness and contrast is telling a different story then what was originally
captured. So, do media outlets keep this duty at the forefront? Not always. Black, Steele and
Barney (1996, pp. 229-233) provide evidence through a case study that even newspapers with
internal guidelines on digital manipulation of photographs break the ethical rules. According to
the case study, the Louisville Courier-Journal was running a story in 1996 about the adult
entertainment business thriving in their city. The front page featured a photograph of a stripper
performing with her leg kicked high in the air. A copy editor, the night news editor and an
assistant managing editor decided to use Adobe Photoshop to extend the hem of the strippers
sweater to cover her pubic region as they thought readers might get offended at what appeared to
be a woman wearing no bottoms. A local television station broke the story after noticing the
difference in the photos when they examined two different editions of the newspaper. Even
publications such as the New York Times, National Geographic, TIME, Newsweek and TV Guide
have not been exempt from doctoring images to some degree (Black et al., 1996).

With consumers demanding more and more photographic content, especially when it
comes to sports, media outlets are finding themselves in a sort of “ethical quicksand” (Smith,
2003, p. 144). Smith (2003) offers an example of a photographer who didn’t do anything to
digitally manipulate a photograph but instead asked a fan at a baseball game to write something on his feet for use in a photograph. When the editors of the paper found out, the photographer was fired. In the mind of the photographer he was just trying to replace the mundane with intrigue when in reality he should have been reporting the facts of the environment. As ethical humans we have a duty to tell the truth of the moment, even if that moment is ordinary.

**Statement of the Problem**

The ease of which photographs can be manipulated with software programs such as Photoshop combined with the increasing demand for photographs by clients and media outlets produces a world in which ethical boundaries can be crossed with something as simple as a mouse click. For this reason it is important to examine what those ethical boundaries are and what photographers are doing to ensure that they themselves do not cross those boundaries. While there are no official industry guidelines or laws in place to say what the ethical boundaries are, specific unions and organizations such as the National Press Photographer’s Association, Getty Images and the Associated Press do have guidelines they expect their staffers, freelancers and members to abide by. Should a photographer ignore or break these guidelines the consequence is termination of not only their job but also potentially their entire archive of photos with that specific media outlet as been the case in the past with Getty Images and Reuters (S. Howard, personal communication, October 30, 2015).

Because the area of ethics in photo manipulation is such a grey area, it is up to individual photographers, photo editors and even those that manage media outlets to constantly take a step back and ask themselves if what they are doing is ethical. They should strive to keep the message of the image intact at all costs and work to breakdown the stereotype that photographers and
photojournalists often fabricate the truth through the over manipulation of photographs (J. Thomas, personal communication, November 9, 2015).

**Definitions of Terms Used**

This study uses terms that are unique to photography and digital photo manipulation, defined as follows:

**Adobe Photoshop:** Raster graphics editing software developed by Adobe in 1988 which has become the industry standard for the digital post-processing of digital photographs and images.

**Burning:** Technique used originally in the darkroom to increase the exposure of specific areas of a photograph that should be darker.

**Dodging:** Technique used originally in the darkroom to decrease the exposure of specific areas of a photograph that should be lighter.

**Brightness:** The degree of luminance or light intensity in an image or a scene.

**Saturation:** The degree of the hue (intensity) of color in an image. Saturated color can be termed strong, vivid, intense or deep.

**Contrast:** The range of difference between highlights and shadow areas in an image.

**Curves:** The adjustment of points throughout the tonal range of an image.

**Levels:** Adjustment used to correct the tonal range and color balance of an image by adjusting intensity levels of shadow, mid tones and highlights.

**Cloning:** Technique used in digital image editing to replace information from one part of an image with information from another part of the image.

**Cropping:** Removal of parts of an image in order to improve the composition of the image.
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**Darkroom:** A room in which total darkness is achievable, permitting light-sensitive materials such as film to be handled without fear of their exposure to light. Where film gets developed and photographic prints are made.

**RAW Image File:** Image files that when processed can be adjusted far more extensively than images captured in other imaging formats, and can be saved as JPEGs, TIFFs, etc. The original RAW file remains unaltered and can be processed at any time for other purposes.

**Photo Manipulation:** A process to transform a photograph into a desired image.

**Photo Illustration:** A type of computer art that begins with a digitized photograph and then employs special image enhancement software, such as Adobe Photoshop, to apply a variety of special effects in an effort to transform the photo into a work of art.

**Editorial Photography:** Photography that is published in magazines, newspapers or on websites, as part of a feature but is separate from “hard news” photojournalism and documentary work.

**Commercial Photography:** Any photography for which the photographer is paid for images rather than works of art. Photographs are used for advertisements, merchandising and product placement.

**Click Bait:** Content on the Internet whose main purpose is to attract attention and draw visitors to a particular web page, especially that of a sensational or provocative nature.

**Organization of Remaining Chapters**

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The current chapter introduces the reader to the thesis while describing the importance of the study and presenting the problem the study is designed to address. Chapter two examines theoretical perspectives that will be applied to the study as well as a review of the literature as it relates to the ethical manipulation of sports photography. Chapter three describes, in detail, the scope and methodology used to answer the
three research questions of the study. Chapter four reveals the analysis of the data collected during the study and discusses the results. Chapter five provides the limitations of the study as well as further research opportunities into the realm of ethical photo manipulation. The appendix lists the questions used in the semi-structured interview instrument as well as transcripts of all interviews.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Philosophical Assumptions

As ethical humans we have a duty to tell the truth of the moment, even if that moment is ordinary. In some cases all we have is our word when it comes to communicating a message with others. That message could be communicated via face-to-face contact, electronically through e-mail or social media, or through visual images such as news broadcasts and documentary or sports photography. For this reason those engaging in the communication of messages through visual images must maintain the highest of ethical standards when working within their craft. However, as new technology enters the landscape, these ethics are often blurred by political agendas, deadlines and the need to provide a steady stream of media to the consumer. For this reason there is no guarantee that ethics will be at the forefront of the actions of photographers and photo editors “It isn’t trustworthy simply because it’s a picture” (Pedro Meyer quoted in Wired magazine, cited by Garry, 2005, p. 321)…“It is trustworthy if someone we trust made it” (Rosenberg, 1995, p. 171 cited by Garry, 2005, p. 321).

The reasons and examples stated above provide never before seen challenges to operate within the boundaries of what is philosophically and ethically sound while also representing challenges to an individual’s own code of ethics. For staff photographers their jobs may be on the line if they don’t produce an image with a desired message; freelance photographers may miss assignments if they don’t provide an image with a specific political message whose downside has the possibility of creating false memories due to the altered nature of the photograph (Garry, 2005). For these reasons ethical considerations must be examined in order to preserve the ethical and philosophical order of a craft that was once deeply rooted in doing what
was ethically correct in the eyes of not only those sending the message but those receiving it as well.

Theoretical Basis

For this study, the theoretic framework of C.J. Reynolds’ (2007) image act theory will be applied as professional photographers are interviewed about not only the ethical standards they are expected to adhere to by the organizations they work for but also their own personal ethical standards. After reviewing the literature on the ethics surrounding photojournalism and the digital manipulation of images, assumptions have been made that these two codes of ethics go hand in hand. Another assumption has been made that should these two not go hand in hand, that one code will show a need for the other code to be realized and enforced.

According to its author “image act theory is an ethical theory that evaluates image manipulation in terms of social actions” (Reynolds, 2007, p. 1). It is important to note that Reynolds’ theory is a spin off of J.L. Austin’s speech act theory. According to Sbisà (2009) speech act theory is characterized by two main ideas. “One is that a distinction has to be drawn between the meaning expressed by an utterance and the way in which the utterance is used (i.e., its ‘force’) and the other is that utterances of every kind (assertions included) can be considered as acts” (Sbisà, 2009, p. 229). Sbisà (2009) makes sure to point out that speech act theory did not derive from analogous conceptions, but rather through analytical philosophy and the works of such philosophers as Frege, Wittgenstein and H.P. Grice in addition to the theory’s author J.L Austin.

To put it simply, Reynolds’ image act theory theorizes that when manipulated, images perform a social action so long as the viewer recognizes the manipulation of the image. Reynolds assumes that some digital manipulation of photographs may not be noticeable by the viewer of
Image act theory’s main proposition is that recognized image manipulations are social actions because “they are (1) directed at an intentional correlate (in this case an image or representation), (2) the doings of somebody (or some agent), (3) they generate changes in the world (but, in order to do this), (4) they need to be recognized by a counterpart” (Reynolds, 2007, p. 2). While there are numerous participants that can view the social action, Reynolds points out that there must always be a minimum of one participant that recognizes the manipulation of an image for it to count as a social action.

Reynolds’ (2007) image act theory is also useful for doing ethical analyses of digital manipulations. This is because the theory suggests the interpretation of a manipulated image as an action “that might accuse, misrepresent, persuade or entertain” (Reynolds, 2007, p. 2). This is an important point because if the photo needs manipulation beyond that of normal adjustments such as brightness, saturation, contrast, etc. then the photo could be being manipulated unethically for the purposes of eliciting a response not intended by the photographer or the image itself. Thus image act theory “encourages us to examine the manipulated portrait in terms of what action was performed” (Reynolds, 2007, p. 4).

Another reason image act theory is relevant to this study is because “modern computing systems have made it possible for large numbers of individuals to easily and quickly manipulate imagery” (Reynolds, 2007, p. 5). Gone are the days of needing a darkroom with chemicals, brushes, burning and dodging tools and other photo manipulation instruments. Now photographers and photo editors need only a computer and a software program capable of performing amazing manipulations in a short amount of time. The Internet also makes it easy for amateur photographers to publish images with their own opinions possibly manipulated into the image. The common thread here is that both of these situations provide a social action.
The Literature

History of Photo Manipulation

The manipulation of photos began long before the advent of digital photography and computer programs like Adobe Photoshop. The act of photo manipulation has been around since photography began in 1839 (Lazaros, 2012; Legro, 2012; Mercedes, 1996; Vujović & Stojanović-Prelević, 2014). According to Mia Finemen, an assistant curator of photography at the Met, “most of the earliest manipulated photographs were attempts to compensate for the new medium’s technical limitations — specifically, its inability to depict the world as it appears to the naked eye” (Legro, 2012). In order to compensate for these technical limitations, photographers used a variety of methods to achieve the desired result in their photographs; everything from inks and paints to double exposure to the use of techniques like burning, dodging and changing the entire exposure of the photograph through the use of push or pull processing (Peres, 2007). With this ability came the curiosity of experimentation, which allowed photographers to see how far they could go in manipulating an image. This experimentation is what produced images that depicted humans with fairies, placed absent family members into portraits and helped world leaders remove unfavorable constituents from photographs. What began as an honest way of making photographs appear more normal evolved into photographs that told the truth up to a point, but not the entire truth (Mitchell, 1994). This practice has paved the way for modern times and a world where the legality and ethics of photo manipulation are not in sync.

Rise of the Digital Age

Digital manipulation of photographs began showing up in newsrooms and magazine offices in the late 1980s (Russial & Wantam 1998) while digital cameras slowly began taking the place of film cameras in the early 1990s (Määnpää, 2014) with such cameras as the 1.5
megapixel Kodak DCS 100, a joint venture between Kodak and Nikon in association with the Associated Press (Russial & Wantam 1998). These two events changed photography and photojournalism drastically. New technology allowed photographers to instantaneously see the result of pressing the shutter button on their cameras instead of needing a darkroom. Photographers would look at the image on a tiny LCD screen on the back of the camera and determine if the photograph was suitable to keep or needed to be taken again. For the first time photographers had an instant proof of their work. This technology has also changed how photos are processed in a post environment. Darkrooms have been replaced by computer terminals and sophisticated software such as Adobe Photoshop.

Photo editing is an inseparable part of photography in the digital age. Cropping, burning and dodging have become commonplace in darkrooms, but photo editing is now more than ever being reserved for computers. Even though the basic procedures have nothing to do with photo manipulation, an overall suspicion usually surrounds all photo editing in general. The challenge is to maintain the credibility of a practice at a time when it is often heavily contested. (Mäenpää, 2014, p. 95)

While the arrival of this new technology is an important milestone in the history of the medium and visual culture in general (Vujović & Stojanović-Prelević, 2014), the rise of digital photography and digital photo manipulation has made it easier to alter images beyond what is ethically accepted by some in the industry. “Changes in photographs may be so faithfully made that they human eye cannot detect the intervention” (Vujović & Stojanović-Prelević, 2014, p. 126). For this reason studies are being done to find ways to identify images that have been altered or “spliced” for malicious purposes (Kakar, Sudah & Wee Ser, 2011; Xu, Liu & Dai, 2014). These studies identified ways to detect malicious manipulation by analyzing the changes
in motion blur between a RAW image and one that had been altered. This type of analysis has practical application for news outlets that wish to maintain a high level of ethical standards as well as a way for photo contests to ensure that participants are meeting the criteria and not submitting images that are altered or might be considered illustrations.

The technology needed to manipulate images has advanced rapidly since its invention (Mercedes, 1996), so much so that it has “altered the manner in which an artist creates and communicates” (Mercedes, 1996, p. 44). The widespread use of digital photo manipulation techniques raises the ceiling of possible concerns over the misuse of the medium, which creates “moral, legal and ethical dilemmas” (Mercedes, 1996, p. 44). For this reason there is far more pressure on the shoulders of photojournalists than there ever before.

**Pressures Photojournalists Face**

Digital photography and photo manipulation has increased the demand for images, which puts new pressures on photojournalists and photographers alike to deliver a product almost instantaneously (Chung-Hung, 2010). In his book *Groping for Ethics in Journalism*, author Ron Smith (2014) describes how the Washington Post and CBS news program *60 Minutes* faced similar dilemmas as they went to press and to the air with stories that could involve them in both legal and ethical battles. Smith (2003) uses these examples to illustrate the point that “management plays a key role in the ability of journalists to practice their profession” (p. 329). The same can be said for the pressure that photographers and photo editors face in the digital age. Because it is now easier to manipulate an image beyond ethical standards without anyone being the wiser, it is up to the management of the media outlet to recognize when the process has gone too far. It comes down to the quality of the message the photograph is trying to report and the ethical standards of the media outlet itself (Smith, 2003).
Numerous instances exist where photojournalists have fallen prey to the pressures they faced in trying to supply their clients with compelling and relevant images. Black, Steele and Barney (1996, pp. 229-233) provide evidence through a case study that even newspapers with internal guidelines on digital manipulation of photographs break the ethical rules. In 1996 the *Louisville Courier-Journal* was running a story about the adult entertainment business thriving in their city. The front page featured a photograph of a stripper performing with her leg kicked high in the air. A copy editor, the night news editor and an assistant managing editor decided to use Adobe Photoshop to extend the hem of the stripper’s sweater to cover her pubic region as they thought readers might get offended at what could be interpreted as a woman wearing no bottoms. A local television station noticed the difference in the photos when they examined two different editions of the newspaper and later broke the story. Even publications such as the *New York Times, National Geographic, TIME, Newsweek* and *TV Guide* have not been exempt from doctoring images to some degree (Black et al., 1996).

With consumers demanding more and more photographic content, especially when it comes to sports, media outlets are finding themselves in a sort of “ethical quicksand” (Smith, 2003, p. 144). Smith (2003) offers an example of a photographer who didn’t do anything to digitally manipulate a photograph but instead asked a fan at a baseball game to write something on his feet for use in a photograph. When the editors of the paper found out, the photographer was fired. In the mind of the photographer he was just trying to replace the mundane with intrigue when in reality he should have been reporting the facts of the environment.

Another example of giving into the pressure came in June of 1996 when *TIME* ran the mug shot of O.J. Simpson on their cover (Gordon & Kittross, 1999). What made their cover different from competitor *Newsweek* was that *TIME* “darkened Simpson’s face digitally and gave
him a darker, more brooding and sinister appearance” (Gordon & Kittross, 1999, p. 74). As seen below (Ararvosis, 2008), the two covers represent far different opinions of Simpson, opinions that may not have been shared by the photo editors of either publication.

![Magazine Covers](image)

**Professionals vs. Amateurs**

With the dawn of the social media age, the number of citizen photojournalists is on the rise across the globe (Mortensen, 2014). This new phenomenon represents tension between the two parties, which may lead to professional photojournalists doing whatever it takes to be at the forefront…including over manipulation of images for publication. What is even more staggering is not that there is a shift from professional photojournalism to citizen photojournalism but rather that many professionals are losing their jobs in favor of citizen photojournalists (Mortensen, 2014). Citizen photojournalists are not held to any ethical guidelines other than their own when they are considering the post-processing of their images. For this reason, professional journalists feel a sense of weakened autonomy and threatened authority (Mortensen, 2014). This movement can best be described as “de-professionalism” according to Mortensen (2014) citing Abbott (1998). The professional photojournalists are left to prove their craft is worthwhile whilst the
invention of devices such as the iPhone and GoPro cameras allows the citizen photojournalist the ability to produce professional quality images and video. Citizens are often already at the scene of a crime, terrorist event, sporting event, etc. before anyone from the media can get there. This means the citizen with a camera or Smartphone has the ability to capture the event as it is happening and record the raw emotion that exists on the faces of witnesses and victims in the aftermath of the event. Media outlets want immediate reactions to events, which professional photojournalists cannot always provide.

The idea of citizen photojournalists is not always a bad one because of reasons mentioned above but also because citizens have a desire to promote change and share the truth of a specific event. For example, the January 25, 2011 revolution in Egypt was a massive event in history where citizen photojournalists armed mostly with camera phones documented a monumental event in the country’s history and sent images around the globe to speak about what was really happening without the possible dilution of the media (Belal, 2011). These citizen reports showed the raw, unedited truth of what was happening hours before any major news outlet could publish a story. In this specific example, we see the positive and ethical side to citizen photojournalists.

Another example of citizen photojournalism that provided truth and unedited footage was the use of camera phones in Iran that documented Neda Agha Soltan being killed during a demonstration in 2009. While these examples may speak to the positive aspects of citizen photojournalism they also speak to a lack of editorial procedures within news media outlets when it comes to selecting this type of photojournalism over more professional and conventional means (Mortensen, 2011).

What Ethics has to Say About it All

Before one can delve into the ethical nature of digital photo manipulation of sports photography, or really the ethics of anything, one must have a clear definition of what ethics is.
Ethics can be defined as “a matter of deciding what to do given a certain situation” (Fenner, 1995, p. 2) or described as values or “the traffic lights of our lives that guide what we think, feel and do” (Griffin, 2012, p. 19). However a person chooses to understand the principles of ethics is up to them so long as they realize that their understanding and beliefs are what define them as a person. It is important that we as humans use our intelligence, character and goodwill towards others in a credible way so that our credibility is realized rather than just perceived. This is known as an ethos (Griffin, 2012).

Taking from Aristotle (trans. 1924) speakers, or in this case photographers and photo editors, may choose to use photographs as a means to persuade viewers on a specific topic. They can do this in either artistic or inartistic ways (Griffin, 2012). Presenting the photograph in an artistic way would mean only slightly editing the photo to enhance features such as contrast, brightness, saturation, sharpness, etc. so long as it does not alter the truth the image is meant to provide. Any editing of the image beyond what was previously described results in an inartistic representation of the image or one that was not originally created by the photographer.

All that being said, the digital age has changed perceptions about photo manipulation, which is why questions of professional ethics are being asked more than ever (Mäenpää, 2014). While a sense of ethics is strong amongst photojournalists (Mäenpää, 2014), there still exists numerous examples of where ethics have been ignored (Black, Steele & Barney, 1999; Gordon & Kittross, 1999; Mäenpää, 2014; Mercedes, 1996), most notably in magazines such as National Geographic, TIME, Newsweek, TV Guide, Readers Digest and so on. For this reason “there is no common ethical guidelines especially for photojournalists, nor are there standard sanctions for ethical violations” (Mäenpää, 2014, p. 93). No one is immune to either an ethical slip-up or intentional ignorance of personal and professional ethics.
One’s personal code of ethics is perhaps the biggest defense against unethical photo manipulation. Because advances in technology have changed so rapidly (Mercedes, 1996) it is up to individuals to police themselves as “the legal profession, artists, educators and the general public have fallen behind, neglecting to confront crucial ethical, moral and legal issues” (Mercedes, 1996, p. 47). It is important to understand that not all photo manipulation is wrong or intended to be harmful to the viewer (Vujović & Stojanović-Prelević, 2014) as it is often a means to make photos more beautiful or easier understood. However, when a photographer or photo editor makes changes so drastic that they detract from the intended representation of the photograph, then ethical standards have been violated (Vujović & Stojanović-Prelević, 2014). “The paradox lies in the fact that all these changes can be easily and quickly made thanks to the modern software programs so that it appears to photographers and editors that there is no big change” (Vujović & Stojanović-Prelević, 2014, p. 126). Really the only way of knowing or proving that a photo has been manipulated unethically is if someone viewing the photo has access to the original RAW image to make a comparison.

Of course photography and photo manipulation is highly subjective and open to vast interpretations. Roland Barthes called this the “polysemy” of a picture (Barthes, 1993). If one relies on his or her code of ethics or personal value system, then this “polysemy” of a photograph can be avoided. This can also be avoided if media outlets create their own ethical standards that they in turn expect their staff to abide by and follow at all times...no matter what pressures they may face from public opinion or from internal staff in high ranking positions. Adding weight to the importance of corporate codes of ethics is a study which found that individuals that worked for companies with codes of ethics were more ethical themselves than those that did not work for companies with codes of ethics (Adams, Tashchian & Shore, 2001). This is due in large part to
the satisfaction employees felt knowing they were working for a company that held ethics highly in their corporate values. A corporate code of ethics can be a simple thing that is taught to new employees upon their starting with the company or it can be an elaborate idea that is constantly reinforced through continuing education. It is important to note that we as humans should not depend on the corporations we work for or the organizations we are members of to have codes of ethics for us to follow. Rather we should strive to define our own codes of ethics that can be reinforced or strengthened by corporate codes or other personal codes of fellow employees or members we may come in contact with.

Rationale

While the literature shows that the industry is aware of the new challenges digital photo manipulation represents it still has no clear ethical guidelines in place for those in the field to follow. Instead it leaves it up to the individual or the organization the individual works for to establish the ethical guidelines of what is allowed and what is not. Theories indicate that photo manipulation, when not ethically sound, can impact the desired message of the photograph as well as change the perceptions individuals have about a specific person or event.

Because of the ease of photo manipulation in the digital world, Reynolds (2007) calls for the cultivation of understanding as it relates to the ethical implications of photo manipulation. That is the reason for this study and the research questions below:

RQ1: To what degree do professional photographers express agreement with any ethical guidelines that are set forth by the organizations they work for concerning photo manipulation?

RQ2: What personal ethical guidelines do professional photographers abide by when doing post-processing of their photographs?
RQ3: What ethical considerations have changed and or evolved since the industry made the jump from film to digital?
Chapter 3: Scope and Methodology

Scope of the Study

Images are a huge part of our daily lives whether we choose to pay attention to them or not. As soon as we turn on the television, log onto a computer, open an app on our phone or open a newspaper or magazine we are bombarded by images. Most of these images have been edited, altered or manipulated in a way that is different from the original image. These edits, alterations or manipulations can be as subtle as enhancing color, contrast, saturation, etc. or as drastic as slimming a woman’s physique in a clothing advertisement. Sports photography is not exempt from these examples. Open any issue of a sports magazine, turn to the sports section in a newspaper or log on to a sports related app and there will be a “healthy dose” of images that have been altered. This study of the ethical considerations for digital manipulation of sports photography seeks to examine this practice and determine how far is too far while providing a working guideline for what is ethical and what is not. This study, therefore, examines the ethical boundaries of digital manipulation of sports photography in the professional realm. How far is too far when it comes to the post processing of an image for publication or for archival purposes?

Research (Lazaros, 2012; Legro, 2012; Mercedes, 1996) has shown that the manipulation of photos has been around nearly as long as the medium itself. Further research (Mäenpää, 2014) has also shown that with the advent of digital photography and computer software programs, like Adobe Photoshop, it is much easier to manipulate photos in order to change the message and truth the original image was intended to evoke. While the research by (Vujović & Stojanović-Prelević, 2014; Mäenpää, 2014; Mortensen, 2014) evaluated specific examples of over manipulation and the ethical guidelines that photographers are asked to follow by the outlets they work for, the photographers personal guidelines and codes of ethics were not examined. The
scope of this study therefore will focus on the personal codes of ethics of sports photographers and how those have developed over their careers to ensure that what they are doing in their post processing work is of an ethical nature.

Methodology

Interviews

This study falls into the qualitative interview genre of depth or long interviews (McCracken 1988 as cited by Baxter & Babbie, 2004) with a diverse group of informants. The informants were selected based on their categorization of wire service (i.e. Getty Images, Associated Press, etc.) employees and or freelance staff or local newspaper staff. Each informant was asked a brief set of semi-structured (Baxter & Babbie, 2004) questions in order to preserve a conversation element during the study. This approach allows for the gathering of data to help the researcher understand “what or how something means to the informant” (Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p. 328). An Appendix is provided with this study to give the reader an opportunity to examine the list of questions used as well as full transcripts of all interviews with informants that volunteered to be a part of the study.

Semi-structured interview questions were used as opposed to structured or unstructured questions (Baxter & Babbie, 2004) because the scope of the study is narrow in that it seeks to examine ethical considerations for digital manipulation of sports photography and not photography in general. The researcher also used semi-structured questions in order to make “explicit comparisons between informants” (Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p. 330).

The interviews were conducted over the telephone and recorded on an electronic device, which not only provides a digital record but also allows the interviews to be transcribed in order to evaluate, compare and contrast the answers given by the informants. The interviews were
conducted between October 30, 2015 and November 10, 2015 using the same process stated above to preserve the validity of the study. This was also done to ensure that informants’ answers to interview questions had no influence on the other informants’ answers. The informants were fully informed of the nature of the study during the interview “tee-up” (Baxter & Babbie, 2004) before agreeing to be interviewed.

**Instrument**

As mentioned above, a semi-structured qualitative interview was done with the chosen informants that responded and agreed to the request to be a part of the study. The instrument consisted of 11 questions of an open-ended variety with follow up questions asked as necessary for clarification or expansion of an answer from the informant. Example questions included: “Are you bound by any professional code of ethics from the organizations you take and edit photos for?; Where do you draw the line in the post processing of your photos?; In what ways do unethical practices make your work more challenging?”

Informants were encouraged to speak their minds, tell stories and provide specific examples to accompany their answers to the questions. The researcher also made every effort not to give into the temptation to appear interesting to the informants, as this can be “counterproductive” (Baxter & Babbie, 2004) to the process.

**Informants**

Eight informants were contacted via e-mail and telephone and asked to voluntarily participate in the study. Two of the informants were suggested through “snowball” sampling after one established informant recommended two others because of their experience in the business and reputation as ethical leaders. Six of the informants contacted work on the national level for various wire services and image archives while two are employed as staff photographers.
for local newspapers on the East and West coasts. The hope is that this diverse group of photographers will provide a vast array of data based on past experiences, education, training and time spent in the field capturing photographs and post-processing the images for publication and distribution.

As mentioned in the previous section, all informants understood that their participation in the study and interviews was voluntary. The interviews lasted no more than 30 minutes. Each of the professional photographers was asked the same set of core questions and additional follow-up questions for clarification. At the end of each interview the informants were thanked for their time and informed of the timeline of the study. Each informant was also informed that they would receive a copy of the study once it was completed and published.

**Ethical Considerations**

Research is made up of choices pertaining to the answering of research questions. It is important that the choices be ethical and that the researcher be “accurate, honest and precise when conducting research and when discussing the meaning of their data” (Rubin et. al., 2010, p. 204). For this reason, the highest ethical standards were applied to this study and extended to all research informants. Only the titles and the names of the media outlets the informants work for will be made public in the results of the study. The reasoning behind this is to preserve the ethical standards of the study and show the credibility of the informants by naming the outlets without fear of the potential for the informants’ answers to be taken as a representation of the opinions of the outlets they are employed with. This is important because their personal codes of ethics proved to echo that of the organizations they are linked with. Ethics are at the forefront of this study because the goal is to establish ethical guidelines for digital manipulation of sports photography, which can then be applied to all aspects of the field.
Procedure

As previously mentioned the interviews were conducted on the telephone between October 30, 2015 and November 10, 2015 and recorded on an electronic device. Each informant was asked a series of semi-structured questions designed to help answer the research questions. The interviews were then transcribed for analysis and evaluation to see what kinds of answers they provided to the research questions. Once the interviews were analyzed, significant findings were recorded and cases were made for universal code of ethics for digital manipulation of not just sports photography but documentary photography, editorial photography and general photojournalism.

Validity

As with any study, validity is an important aspect both on the part of the researcher and that of the research informants. Validity of the study ensures that what is intended to be studied is in fact being studied in a truthful manner (Rubin et. al., 2010). For these reasons the informants chosen are respected professionals in the field of sports photography and or photojournalism with extensive experience and their answers will be examined for truthfulness and validity in order to uphold the ethical standards of the study.
Chapter 4: The Study

Introduction

The goal of this study was to establish a set of ethical considerations and guidelines for the digital manipulation of sports photography based on interviews with professional photographers from both national wire services and the local newspapers. The interviews examined the ethical standards and practices of several photographers throughout their careers as well as opinions on where the ethical boundaries are in regard to post processing of photographs to be published to wire services, newspapers, magazines, websites as well as for archival purposes. The study was not designed to identify specific instances where ethical lines were crossed although interview questions did address the subject. Most questions in the interviews focused on the personal ethical standards of the photographers as well as any professional standards they are required to abide by from either union organizations or the media organizations they are employed by.

As discussed in the previous paragraph, examples of ethical breeches in post processing were discussed heavily despite not being the sole focus of the study. The reason for this elaborate discussion was to establish that ethical credibility is one of the biggest positive attributes of a professional photographer. Several of the informants stated that these instances of ethical breeches represent an attack on their personal credibility and the authenticity or perceived lack of authenticity of their photographs. While informants would not say verbatim that these instances made them angry, they did hint that they represent some challenges to their craft, which they reported to be frustrating.

The results of the interviews showed that ethics are at the forefront when the informants are post processing their photographs and that a career is not worth throwing away in order to
make a photograph more appealing or more dramatic. This stance echoes existing research (Vujović & Stojanović-Prelević, 2014), which holds the ethics of newspaper photography and the photographers that produce the images in high regard in respect to what is expected by fellow peers in the industry.

**Data Analysis**

The stories and real-world examples provided by the informants provide a link to established research while reinforcing the importance and need for ethical standards and guidelines within the sports and editorial photography industries. Five of the eight informants targeted responded to the request and agreed to voluntarily participate in the study, which represents a 62.5% participation rate. Additionally, two of the five informants (40%) work for or freelance for national wire services and professional sports leagues such as Getty Images, AP Images and the National Football League, two (40%) work for local newspapers in Jacksonville, FL and Spokane, WA, and one (20%) considered himself a corporate photographer who abides by editorial standards when working with photos that are to be published out of house. It is important to note that the above breakdown represents the primary outlet that each photographer works for. There was a lot of crossover between the photographers as some also do work for local newspapers, private publications, wire services and local sports leagues in addition to their primary responsibilities.

**Informants**

As mentioned above, eight informants were targeted for the study with five (62.5%) agreeing to be voluntary participants for the semi-structured interview. All informants that participated were male, which does result in this study being gender, biased which is also
indicative of the stereotype of the industry. Below is detailed information about the five informants that participated in the study:

Shawn Howard – staff photographer with Getty Images for over 15 years. Shawn’s work has taken him to all 50 states as well as 25 countries where he has photographed the Tour de France, the World Series, Super Bowls, three Olympic Games and numerous Major Championships on the PGA TOUR.

Chad Collins – senior staff photographer and photo official for the PGA TOUR. Chad’s work began as a lab tech for several years working in a darkroom processing photos for a variety of clients. He then transitioned into photographing Jacksonville Jaguars football games as a staff photographer before taking a job with the PGA TOUR in the late 1990s. Chad has photographed golf all over the United States and the World.

Brad Smith – staff photographer for the Florida Times Union in Jacksonville, FL. Brad has been a staff photographer for the Jacksonville based newspaper since finishing his photographic studies in Daytona Beach over 31 years ago.

Jack Thomas – staff photographer from the Spokesman Review in Spokane, WA. Jack has been a staff photographer for the Spokane based newspaper for over 26 years.

Paul Kramer – freelance photographer for the NFL and contributor to Associated Press Images. Paul began in photography while a student at Flagler College in St. Augustine, FL and worked his way into the professional world of the NFL and AP through connections and being an assistant. He has since worked multiple Super Bowls and can be found on the sidelines virtually every weekend during the NFL season.
These informants were targeted based on their experience in the industry and their wide range of experiences covering different types of sporting events as well as real-world events for newspapers and magazines.

**Results of the Study**

The results of the semi-structured interview revealed four distinct areas of data from the informants: (1) The following of ethical guidelines in order to uphold an ethical reputation with others in the field, (2) The lack of time to commit unethical acts due to tight deadlines and the demand for images from clients, (3) The loss of public credibility because of unethically manipulated images and (4) How old darkroom techniques are still influencing and being applied to the new reality of digital photo manipulation.

These four data points were shared by 100% of the informants interviewed with each informant discussing each point with a variety of importance. What follows are detailed accounts of the four areas from the five informants that agreed to participate in the study.

**Reputation with Others**

The informants spoke about the high importance of their reputations within the industry as one guideline, of sorts, that forces them to act ethically when post processing their photographs: “you want to be known as a professional that takes their job seriously, you want to be known as a trusted person, especially in our position where we have access to so many top athletes” (C. Collins, personal communication, November 5, 2015). Jack Thomas (personal communication, November 9, 2015), a veteran photographer for the Spokesman Review in Spokane, Washington echoes Collins’ view about their duty as ethical members of the media saying
I just feel they are chipping away at my credibility because one day I’m going to get just an incredible picture and half the people on the street won’t believe that I shot it exactly that way. And so it takes away from us in very, very small ways.

While their reputations as ethical photographers and members of the media weigh heavily on their actions, some informants did admit that pressures and the ease of manipulation does make it easier for ethical slipups to occur.

With the technology changing it could easily allow you to do these things and I just do not want to cross that line. Like 10 years ago Photoshop was not what Photoshop is today. We take a lot more time to make these adjustments and changes but now it’s literally like the click of a button and you can change things and you just don’t want to go there (P. Kramer, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

Another aspect of industry reputation spoken of by the informants was the juxtaposition between the size of the industry and how easily word can travel of an unethical photographer as offered by Shawn Howard (personal communication, October, 30, 2015), a 15 year staff photographer for Getty Images “it’s such a small community that we work in that if anyone were to manipulate a photo it has wide-reaching ramifications.”

**Time**

Lack of time and tight deadlines was the second reason why the informants reported that they don’t fall into the ethical trap that digital manipulation can create.

I don’t do any burning or dodging when I’m editing strictly just adjust the levels ever so slightly and just crop pictures and that’s really my max of what I’ll do. And another reason that’s my max is the deadline is so tight on these pictures that you do not have time to even do some of that, so you’re trying to get all this stuff as correct as possible
within camera, you do not have to do any post-production work (P. Kramer, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

S. Howard (personal communication, October 30, 2015) makes a similar point “we have to put up so many pictures at golf tournaments…I don’t have a lot of time to manipulate the photos.”

The reason deadlines are so tight is because clients are demanding more and more content quicker because of the digital nature of the media. Newspapers and magazines are no longer the only outlets requiring photos from wire services such as the AP and Getty

When you’re sitting in the workroom at a major sporting event whether it’s NCCA football or NCAA basketball and you’re in there with 20 guys…it used to be that 18 of those guys worked for newspapers or AP and couple guys are shooting for the college or something. Now there’s like two newspaper guys in there, one AP guy like 15 or 16 guys shooting for the college, they are shooting for agencies, promotional publications and those guys are doing completely different stuff (Jack Thomas, personal communication, November 9, 2015).

**Public Credibility**

Going beyond the idea of upholding an ethical reputation within the industry, the informants reported that unethical manipulation also works against their credibility with the public who consume the images on a daily basis across a wide variety of outlets

No one individual incident is going to bring what we do to an end, but I think there is definitely a cumulative effect on the credibility of the media and of photojournalism when that stuff goes on and the more that those things are brought to the public eye, and rightly so, the more people second guess what they are seeing, whether it’s legitimate imagery or not (B. Smith, personal communication, November 5, 2015).
Thomas (personal communication, November 9, 2015) told a story about how the credibility of the public has been tarnished because of all of the unethical manipulation that occurs in the digital age of photography.

So we did a story several years ago, not me, but one of our photographers did a story about meth addicts. She had several pictures of people lighting up, partying, passing out and all kinds of stuff. People were pretty assured that that was all set up and fake and this woman that did it is probably one of the most gifted documentary photographers we’ve ever known and yet all of her work was called into question. But on the other hand she also slept on the floor of some drug houses waiting for a picture to happen in the middle of the night, so ethics made her do that rather than try to make it happen at another hour. Perhaps Collins (personal communication, November 5, 2015) sums up the idea of an affect on credibility best with his statement concerning the already strengthened negative perception of professional photographers in the media by saying.

The people that are unethical make us all look bad. You know you have either the paparazzi or you have someone who is over manipulating photos it makes it into the news and then everyone looks at you as a person with a camera and oh you’re one of those guys. So it’s very hard for the public to tell the difference between a quality, ethical photographer and somebody who is just trying to make a quick buck any way they can.

**Darkroom to Digital**

The fourth and final theme identified by the interviews with the informants was the transition from processing photos in the darkroom to processing the images digitally on a computer and how the techniques have stayed the same while the tools used to execute the techniques have changed. Even with all that computer programs such as Adobe Photoshop can
do, the photographers interviewed for this study still stick with the tried and true ethical methods of the darkroom. Techniques like burning and dodging are still used along with sharpening, curves, bumping saturation and contrast and even adding a slight blur to the background for commercial projects such as magazine covers and approved photo illustrations. However, care is still taken to ensure that these techniques are not taken past any ethical boundaries the ethical line that all the informants strive not to cross.

I’m trying to make it look more like what your eye can comprehend as opposed to what a camera sensor can comprehend. But I’m not taking it some place that’s a whole different world that changes the meaning of the images or changes the content of the images (B. Smith, personal communication, November 5, 2015).

Collins, who began his career as a lab technician in darkrooms, shares the same ethical standard as Smith, saying

I don’t do anything that I couldn’t do in the darkroom. And really the rules with what I do with my editorial photography is cropping and toning and maybe a hair dodging and burning just to bring out a shadow detail or something like that…nothing that I couldn’t have done with my hands in the darkroom (C. Collins, personal communication, November 5, 2015).

Thomas cites that the idea of manipulation in the digital world is still strange when compared to what was done in the darkroom

Because back in those days you actually had to take out a pair of scissors and cut a print and past it on another one or things like that, so that [manipulation] wasn’t a major concern. Maybe back in the film days you could say that the major concerns were
manipulating before the photo was taken as opposed to manipulation of the photo itself (J. Thomas, personal communication, November 9, 2015).

The idea that if it can’t be done in the darkroom then it shouldn’t be done in Photoshop was a thought shared by all five informants. It is perhaps the greatest example of the figurative or fine line (P. Kramer, personal communication personal, November 10, 2015) that photographers shouldn’t cross when they are processing an image in Photoshop or any other digital photo manipulation software.

**Answering the Research Questions**

This study set out to answer three research questions that were specific to the study of ethical considerations for digital manipulation of sports photography. The first question:

**RQ1:** To what degree do professional photographers express agreement with any ethical guidelines that are set forth by the organizations they work for concerning photo manipulation?

Only three of the five informants spoke about physical, on paper ethical guidelines that they were required to sign and abide by with the organizations they work for. Shawn Howard was required to sign a form by Getty Images “we all sign an anti or a non manipulation contract”…“we sign that contract saying that we are subject to being terminated if we do anything that is beyond what the parameters are allowed” (S. Howard, personal communication, October 30, 2015). Thomas reported that he was bound by the ethical guidelines of the National Press Photographer’s Association, a union that he and many other photographers, photojournalists and even videographers are members of. While Kramer is not required to sign anything for the NFL he was aware of guidelines from the AP saying “there are guidelines that people have to adhere by, so I just kind of apply those same guidelines that AP would have, that
Getty would have across the board when you’re doing any type of editorial work” (P. Kramer, personal communication, November 10, 2015). Smith reported that while the Florida Times Union doesn’t require a signature, that they do have ethical guidelines, but says that his are “probably higher than theirs.”

The second research question:

RQ2: What personal ethical guidelines do professional photographers abide by when doing post-processing on their photographs?

As mentioned in the last section of the results of the study, the most common answer was that anything that can’t be done in the darkroom shouldn’t be done in Photoshop. Techniques like burning, dodging, contrast enhancement, saturation, and now the use of curves are all within the ethical boundaries so long as they are not done in a way that changes the story or message of the photo.

The third research question:

RQ3: What ethical considerations have changed and or evolved since the industry made the jump from film to digital?

It didn’t appear that any ethical considerations changed as the industry made the jump from film to digital. What did change was the ease at which an unethical manipulation can now be made. What has also changed is the demand by clients for images so quickly after an event has happened or while an event is happening. Clients are also demanding photographs that show the action more prominently, which has lead to photographers altering images past the point of what is considered ethical by some in the industry according to the informants in this study.

**Discussion**

Today photographs are everywhere we look, on billboards, sides of public
transportation, in newspapers and magazines and all over the Internet as a part of articles, advertisements and those annoying links at the bottoms of websites, sometimes referred to as “click bait” (J. Thomas, personal communication, November 9, 2015). While photographs, in the media sense, used to be primarily for filling space, they are now used for so much more (Vujović & Stojanović-Prelević, 2014). Now, more than ever, photographers and the media as a whole have the duty to be ethical pillars when it comes to making photographs available for consumers to digest, share and interpret (Mäenpää, 2014). This study and the informants that participated in it provided proof that ethics are at the center of everything they do. Ethics have always and will continue to provide a backbone to their craft despite the ease of unethical manipulation through Photoshop and even the misrepresentation of captions (S. Howard, personal communication, October 30, 2015). Examples such as the cover of National Geographic with the Pyramids in Egypt, the Reuters photo depicting enhanced smoke and even the O.J Simpson mug shot on the cover of TIME and Newsweek serve as evidence that ethical guidelines are still left up to the opinions of the individual. Those examples also serve as a stereotype of the modern photographer (J. Thomas, personal communication, November 10, 2015) that the general public, in some cases, has no choice but to believe in a stereotype that all photographers should be striving to breakdown, though they don’t always make the needed effort (B. Smith, personal communication, November, 5, 2015).

So what does any of this have to do with communication? Why wouldn’t we want photographers making photographs better, more vibrant and less distracting? The answer is credibility. Photographs should be seen and understood as unaltered truth; just like the articles and words they are seen next to (Vujović & Stojanović-Prelević, 2014). Part of good
communication is being honest, ethical and truthful and so those three things must be at the forefront of a photographer’s mind when he or she is taking the photograph, editing the photograph and submitting the photograph. After all, the meaning of a photograph is “conditioned by culture, ideology, knowledge and experience, photographers, editors, and whoever looks at it” (Vujović & Stojanović-Prelević, 2014, P. 127). For this reason, photographers and editors alike have a duty to uphold the highest ethical standards at all times when it comes to the take and post processing of the image. If the image is of an ethical and honest event, then the final image should represent that in an honest and ethical way, hence Marshall McLuhan’s (1964) famous phrase “the medium is the message.”
Limitations of the Study

Any research study or thesis is not without its limitations and this thesis is no exception to that statement. There were three distinct limitations that stood out once this study was completed. The first was the time in which was available to conduct the study. Because of the schedule of the program at Gonzaga University and the personal schedule of the researcher, only a few weeks were available in which to conduct the study. This limited the amount of research that could be done to identify possible informants for the study as there were certain criteria that needed to be met by the informants such as being a paid staff member or professional freelancer who worked for either a major wire service or reputable local newspaper or magazine. Time was also a limiting factor in regard to how much time was available with each individual informant. Because the informants that agreed to participate are constantly under deadline, on assignment or traveling, approximately 30 minutes for an interview was all that the informants were able to provide. This limited the amount of questions and more importantly follow up questions in order to supply the researcher with as much data as possible.

The second limiting factor of the study was the gender bias that was created by having only male informants. No women were included in this study because no women were identified as potential informants for the study. Only assumptions can be made about how a woman would have answered the questions, but in retrospect women should be included as informants in future studies in the realm of digital manipulation of sports photography.

The last limiting factor of the study was the number of informants that were targeted and that ended up volunteering to be a part of the study. As mentioned above, time was a huge limiting factor in the number of informants that were targeted therefore yeilding a small sample
for the study. More informants would have served to strengthen the study and would have provided a more detailed and diversified account of the ethical guidelines for digital manipulation of sports photography.

**Recommendations for Further Studies**

While all of the respondents identified similar guidelines they follow and similar reasons why they follow them, a further study could seek to find out what influenced or still influences those reasons for following the guidelines. Are they being followed because that is what they were taught in school, by a mentor or was ingrained in them through an internship or early job? What would happen if the guidelines were changed in the digital age to allow what was previously thought to be unethical? These are questions that a more in depth study across a wide range of informants could uncover. A study of this nature could also uncover how ethics have evolved as the industry has moved from film and darkroom work into digital work that can be done anytime and anywhere.

Another topic that was discussed by the informants but was not included in the data was that of making editorial notes and writing captions and how those are just as important ethically as the manipulation or editing of the photo itself. Research could be done that focuses on whether an editorial note or caption depicting that the photo was retouched, had filters applied to it or was merged with another photo means that the photo is ethical because no secrets are being kept. This also opens up the door as to how ethical commercial photography such as fashion photography, magazine covers and the like are in contrast to editorial photography, which is what was examined through this study.

Research should also be done that focuses on the use of social media apps such as Instagram and the filters that the app makes available for quick edits of photos taken with a
mobile device such as an iPhone or iPad. This represents the new frontier in quick and mobile editorial photography as several magazines such as *Sports Illustrated* are already using these types of photos for covers and features (S. Howard, personal communication, October 30, 2015). Where as once you didn’t need a computer to edit and distribute photos, technology is now making that past a reality again as more and more people are using a Smartphone equipped with high megapixel cameras and mobile versions of Adobe Photoshop as well as hundreds of other photo editing apps. A study to examine the ethics of this new frontier is certainly needed as our lives become increasingly more mobile.

**Conclusions**

This study showed that ethics are at the forefront of a professional sports and editorial photographer’s mind whenever they are composing a photograph, editing a photograph, captioning a photograph and uploading a photo for distribution to media outlets and clients all over the world. While they are aware of their ethical responsibilities, especially while post processing their images, one photographer did admit that they could still do a better job and hold each other more accountable and to a higher standard (B. Smith, personal communication, November 5, 2015). Photographers also recognize that it is their duty to be as ethical as possible in an effort to separate themselves from others in within the industry as well as from amateurs armed only with camera phones or pro-sumer cameras (Mäenpää, 2014).

While the opportunities to engage in unethical post processing are seemingly endless, the consequences are limited and quite precise: termination and in some cases the wiping out of the photographer’s entire catalog or archive from sites like Getty Images (S. Howard, personal communication, October 30, 2015). Because photos are being unethically manipulated so often by professionals, wire services such as Reuters are now no longer accepting images converted
from RAW files and are instead only accepting in camera JPEGs from freelancers and staff according to a letter sent out in November of 2015 (Johnson, 2015). This is a huge precedent being set in the industry to combat unethical behavior by photographers and photo editors who are attempting to scoop one another at the risk of losing their jobs and strengthening the stereotype that photographers tell altered versions of the truth through manipulated photographs.

The steps taken by Reuters will not completely solve the issues of unethical photo manipulation, but they will put pressure on the industry while showing that the industry is aware of the issues that the digital era as brought on. What still remains is the grey area of what is unethical, how far is too far? The only ones that have that answer are the photographers themselves who are the gatekeepers of what is ethical and what is not. They have a duty to report what is true through the use of photographs. Image act theory (Reynolds, 2007) should be applied by photographers and those in the industry going forward to ensure that they are working under the highest of ethical standards and not diluting or changing the intended message of the photography which is to be a true depiction of the events that took place as the shutter was being pressed on the camera.
References


ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR DIGITAL MANIPULATION OF SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY


Appendix A

Interview Questions

What personal code of ethics do you follow when you are post processing your photos?

Have these personal ethical codes changed or evolved throughout your career? If so how?

Can simple adjustments like contrast, brightness, saturation, etc. become unethical if they are adjusted too much? How so?

Are you bound by any professional code of ethics from the organizations you take and edit photos for? If so please explain the guidelines you are bound by.

Where do you draw the line in the post processing of your photos? What constitutes unethical post processing?

Have you ever been asked by an organization or person to alter an image in an unethical way? If yes please explain.

What is your reaction as a professional when you hear of a reputable photographer or organization altering an image in an unethical way such as the OJ Simpson photo in TIME magazine or the Egyptian Pyramids in National Geographic?

Have you ever discussed the subject of ethical photo editing with colleagues? How did the conversation come up? What was discussed?

What role do ethics play in sports photography versus documentary photography or general photojournalism?

In what ways do ethics make your work challenging?

In what ways to unethical practices make your work challenging?
Appendix B

Interview Transcripts

Shawn Howard

>> I was thinking about a few things as a first off and that’s that as a Getty staffer we all sign an anti or a non-manipulation…contract. Basically it’s such a small community that we work in that if anyone were to manipulate a photo it has wide-reaching ramifications. So, we all sign something saying that we basically, in Photoshop, we do very minimal things like curves, highlights…I mean obviously I work in golf so things like shadows are a big deal under golfer’s hats. So, we can work on that kind of stuff, but like I said we sign that contract saying that we are subject to being terminated if we do anything that is beyond what the parameters are allowed.

Recently we hired a photographer to cover all 18 holes at Oakmont Country Club and he sat down with me at the TOUR Championship where Chad and Steve were both working and he showed me some of photos and said I have a pole camera shadow, can I burn that out or can I clone that out and I said absolutely not. That’s a photo that’s not being delivered to our clients on the feed…like I was at basketball two nights ago and when I hit send that goes to ESPN, Bleacher Report, New York Times.com, SI.com, I mean when I send a photo from a basketball game or a Texas A & M football game, I do 20 weeks a year of golf, but when I’m at home here in Houston, I do a little bit of everything in town, so when I hit send that’s going out on the feed to hundreds and hundreds of clients where as this guy who lives in Pittsburgh was hired to just shoot the course. He’s been there probably a hundred times over the years and knows exactly where to go and he couldn’t really even work on tire marks, you know the carts that had been working on the course in the morning…and you would think that’s not going on the feed, it’s just going to our site to be used in the months before the U.S. Open next year. There’s really no gray
area, you basically just have to tow the line and do what you would do with an easel as if it were 20 years ago. That’s about basically how it’s been explained to us: whatever you can do in a darkroom, you’re allowed to do in Photoshop. Dodging and burning, working a little bit on scales, a little bit of contrast but there’s really not much more you can do to the photos because so many people are aware of manipulated photos and they are hugely scrutinized now. I don’t know if you know or if Chad told you this story, but a couple of years back a freelancer working for Getty – a big part of what we do on Sundays is make sure photographs are available commercially for Titelst and Taylormade – well he cloned the head of a caddie out of a photo and he made the mistake of sending the before and after, the manipulated and the non-manipulated one. I was in Scotland with my boss and we were walking to get the train into London to go home and he got the phone call and it was a very big fire that the company had to put out for a couple of months. And Getty can sometimes be construed as the Wal-Mart of the industry, so there are a lot of people that are not fans of Getty for a multitude of reasons because we are the biggest company as far as sales and volume and how many assets we have, how many millions of assets we have sitting on our site. We own iStock, The Image Bank, all that material, all the TIME-Life collection, Sports Illustrated’s collection and Holt and Getty. There is millions of photos that are stored on our site…there is a lot of people that consider us the “Evil Empire” because we have so many assets and we were bought by the Carlisle group for nearly $3 billion, over $3 billion so we are the biggest company in the business and when something like that happens, believe me there is plenty of people that are kind of chuckling and all too happy to make comments on social media sites. But that was a considerable amount of time ago and we, the unfortunate part of that is that we took everyone of the assets that guy had every created and we paid for to create, dropped off the site in a span of a couple weeks. There are a lot of trophy
photos that he did at events and he was the sole photographer there for the TOUR and for Getty and I think what we did is we gave the entire take on…somehow we got it to the TOUR so those trophy shots do exist in the TOUR archive, but they are not on our site, which is a very unfortunate circumstance. We took the higher ground saying we are willing to lose content and future sales down the road to kind of purge all that guy’s material from the site for the greater good. Not sure if you heard about what happened this year…there was a lot of controversy over a guy who did a photo feature and one of his photos was taken in a different town than the rest of the feature and they made a big deal about that…it’s not like he manipulated it…That was one of the biggest in a couple of years. A guy had cropped out the edge of a guy running in like a battlefield with a video camera and I don’t think the photo gains much by him by doing that and he certainly got a huge black eye and I think he was a Reuters freelancer and he can no longer work with Reuters…and a woman also sent out a photo on USA Today’s feed saying that it was Ichiro’s 3,000th hit and people knew immediately that were at the game that it was not, that she missed that moment and she mis-captioned the photo and I think she is no longer working with that company. No one messes around anymore, when someone does something stupid then that person is pretty much purged from working for that client and I think she worked for Ozuma now as a contributor, but it was a really big deal when she manipulated the credit of that photo at Yankee Stadium.

>> I just try and get my captions correct every time I’m working at an event and I just try to not push the line too much on burning and dodging and Photoshop and stuff like that and basically I have some actions that I’ve setup in Photoshop and basically I just…we have to put up so many pictures at golf tournaments that I’m at so I don’t have a lot of time to manipulate the photos. I basically just work on shadows and curves, a little big of sharpening because I was told at the
Olympics in Athens that the digital cameras are inherently not sharp, So, in our actions we have a bit of sharpening that we do have in our un-sharp mask.

>> There’s more eyeballs looking at all of the wire services making sure that the photos are not tampered with in a deliberate way…I was doing a Mets game in 1985 and there was not a lot you could do in the darkroom because it took so long to put photos out…we had a n easel and a dryer and it was just very, very different. Now I can run in and send 10 photos in five minutes with all the actions we have now and the clients are demanding photos so quickly now at major events, it’s a big competition to get the first photos out.

>> If the guys that are shooting a golf course, I mean that is…the fact that he was there and he used a pole cam and that created a shadow, I mean that’s a lot different than cloning out a guy running through a battlefield, like the Reuters guy did, but I told the guy he couldn’t do it, but I’m sure people go in the morning and shoot stuff and then work on stuff to enhance the photograph, especially golf course photography because there is so much that can be done in Photoshop to make the golf hole look better but there’s not a whole lot we can really do with the photos. You just have to [inaudible] the shadows and where you are standing. The pole camera was a huge instance where if he was doing it for Sports Illustrated, he might have had no problem with a designer in New York doing it, but since he was putting it on Getty he was told he could not do it.

>> There’s 24 people that do my job in the U.S. and when a person from the U.K. office comes over they are allowed to use graduated filters and polarizers and we’re not and when I’m editing for certain guys, I’ll get on the radio and say Dave, I assume you used a polarizer on this and he’d say yes and so we would put an editors note in the caption on all the photos that go out, but for some reason there are a lot of papers over here that really frown on it, like we used an orange
filter once at The Masters and I think the Dallas Morning News went bizerk and were like why were you using, there was not editor’s note but it was obvious that there was a silhouette of Mike Weir hitting a shot on 15 with an orange filter because it was late in the day because of a weather delay, but, the photo ran on several websites, but the Dallas Morning News called our New York office and were very unhappy with it. So all of the U.S. staffers are not allowed to use any type of filters…in doing editorial photos. Now if I did a feature of a guy cleaning the Golden Gate Bridge and it’s a feature then at that point I think we are allowed to use it, but any editorial, live coverage of events we are not allowed to use any filters.

>> No, no, because I was a contributor to All Sport before they were bought by Getty and I worked for UPI when I first started in New York City so there has never been a time when someone said you have to manipulate that photo…there have been clients who said oh he’s wearing the wrong type of logo…I remember we were doing, I was art directing a shoot we were doing at an LPGA event where we set up a set and brought players in and the agent is like can you just PS that logo off and we said no we can’t PS the logo off. We can cover it with a sweater or something like that, but we certainly can’t Photoshop the logo off because she wasn’t wearing the proper shirt. And there’s been times when they’ve said we are going to have an announcement tomorrow that she’s going to be sponsored by a new person and we shot those shirts and we just didn’t do anything with the photos until the next day when they had the release. Basically the girl made herself available that day, but we had been told don’t put out the photos until the next day.

>> I just think it’s a mistake. It didn’t enhance the photo much and the guy has pretty much tarnished his career for the rest of the time. And I think Reuters also had a photo where they created some kind of billowing smoke that made the scene look more like a battlefield than it
was and there is also a hockey photo that has two pucks in it and that guy is still working, I’m not going to name any names, but he is still working in New York and he has a photo with two pucks in it. So, I was wondering ok why is there a hockey puck on the ground on the ice and why is there one against the goalie’s blocker?

>> There’s also a photo of Tiger that’s on the cover of Vanity Fair and that was mostly just done in curves, I don’t think they added or took anything out and I don’t think that even approached the line of any ethical issues.

>> I think the actions in Photoshop, you can do a lot of things and tons of different effects you can put on photos and for the most part the industry, the people I work with just tow the line and know exactly what they can and can’t do to a photo because you know you’re job is at risk if you do something stupid and you hit send and you can’t bring that photo back, once it’s out, it’s out. But, I will tell you this…at the PLAYERS, at the PGA Championship a few years ago at Valhalla, we had a guy there doing kind of like, we call it, um, sometimes we create a separate media ID number and it’s basically like Instagram photos and a lot of them ran from Valhalla because there was very dramatic lighting at the end of the day because of the storm that was coming in and all that, and they put in note that a digital filter was added to this photo. When I was in Sochi, I did some portraits of some of the athletes and I put a filter on them and just put a note saying I used a couple of special effects filters to just give them a look because I was on the set of the Today Show and there was a 24 hour delay and there was kinds of broadcast out because I was shooting on the set of the Today Show and they didn’t want any other media outlets to use it that were broadcasting. So I would say that Instagram and Social Media have changed the way people are putting out photos and are just going to certain events and just shooting with an iPhone the whole day and I think maybe a cover of Sports Illustrated was a A-
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Rod photo that a Getty freelancer, and he tweaked it, he just toned it up and it looked really great and it ran on the cover of Sports Illustrated.

>> I’ve had people say do you think I’ve gone too far in curves here and I mean I think there are plenty of people who push it as far as burning and curves, but that’s something you could do in a darkroom 25 years ago. But I’ve seen some photographs where I kind of scratch my head and go wow that person did a lot of work on that photo…but cloning is the no no, you cannot clone anything out of a photograph.

>> There’s more breeches certainly in news photography, a lot more it seems like…occasionally we will stitch together a nice panoramic of a pretty golf hole, but there is really no stitching being done in, very often.

>> When I go to an event, I know exactly what parameters are and what we can and can’t do and as long as you are within those parameters it’s just another day at the office.

>> I would say having Photoshop makes it a lot easier to do things to photos compared to having an easel and a tray with three different chemicals in it…it’s certainly a lot easier and quicker to manipulate a photo.

Chad Collins

>> Cliff notes version is I discovered photography when I was junior high school, a friend of mine was in camera club and one after school he asked me to come into the darkroom and hang out with him while he was developing some film and pictures and making prints and just that experience of seeing him develop film and watch that first print come up in the developer, it seemed so magical and I really kind of got hooked and that was my real introduction to the darkroom. Then I just kind of picked up photography as a hobby all through high school, I did all the different graphics classes and yearbook classes all the way through. After high school I went
to the Southeast Center of Photographic Studies in Daytona Beach and studied photography in college and got my degree and then just continued to work in the lab business, I worked as a lab tech for years through college, so I had a lot of darkroom experience and that was kind of my main thing away from shooting. From college, I moved back to Jacksonville in ’93, my dad had some health problems, so I moved back up to Jax. I had been doing a lot of freelance work with the Daytona Speedway and kind of been specializing in sports at that point. Moved back to Jax and worked for a portrait studio doing high school yearbook photography for a few years, while I was still freelancing, ended up getting a job with a startup magazine called Jacksonville Sports where I was the staff photographer and eventually the managing editor. From there I had made contacts at the PGA TOUR and the Jaguars and worked for the Jaguars for 3 seasons as one of their staff photographers doing game day stuff and then the offer came to work fulltime for the PGA TOUR in ’98 and about 18 years ago that’s been it ever since.

>> That’s kind of the thing…I spent many, many hours in the darkroom and that was kind of my specialty and profession throughout my college years.

>> Yeah I really do because the background of darkroom work really makes it kind of simple to…I don’t do anything that I couldn’t do in the darkroom. And really the rules with what I do with my editorial photography is cropping and toning and maybe a hair dodging and burning just to bring out a shadow detail or something like that…nothing that I couldn’t have done with my hands in the darkroom.”

>> Well I think the technique has changed and the tools have changed but I think the mindset and the ethics shouldn’t change. I think that from an editorial standpoint you’re there to tell a story as it happened and as a photographer your job is to deliver images that portray the story without manipulation.
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>> That’s a really good question and it’s hard to really define that because where is that line? Do you want to bring out a little more sky detail burning or adjusting contrast and in the film days I would use a different grade of polycontrast paper and I would use a different contrast filter. So I think that overdoing it to the point of making it look fake or look like a composite photo, there is a line, it’s just a very blurry line. It’s not like you can say this one was done just enough and this one was done just too much. I think it’s an individual case by case basis.

>> No the TOUR does not and that’s kind of the interesting line that I follow is that the TOUR is not an editorial outlet. The TOUR is a corporate outlet and I am a corporate photographer within that organization. So, from the standpoint of the TOUR they don’t really give us any specific restrictions because our images are used in so many different composites and so many different layouts and designs that they don’t really have a specific set of rules. Now, the other half of that is that we are editorial photographers in the sense that we transmit images to Getty. So, those images are basically bound by Getty’s editorial guidelines. And we take those on that anything we over-manipulate or do anything funny with that stays in house and that’s mostly what our design team works with.

>> Exactly and that’s the other thing that is a little bit different nowadays with digital is that so many clients want that Instagram look, that over processed look or the black and white conversions because we don’t have black and white film anymore. So anytime we do a conversion like that, we have to put an editor’s note in it so that at least it will say there is some sort of manipulation that has happened to the picture. That keeps the editorial integrity intact because they know it was a photo illustration.

>> I think that any time you remove an element or you clone something out or you add something in, I think if you change the elements of the photograph, if you change the look of the
lighting to an extreme point...if it’s sunny and you want to make it look overcast, you really
change the density of the image too much, I think those a pretty much the areas that are pretty cut
and dry. You know, you want the image to look fairly natural...No I don’t think that you want to
do anything along those lines. My job, for the most part, is to take pretty pictures. To represent
the PGA TOUR, Champions Tour, Web.com wherever we are is to represent, you know,
everything in a fairly positive light because that’s that fine line between corporate and editorial
that we have to ride here in our department, you know, because we are still basically a PR arm of
the PGAT TOUR.

>> No, I really can’t remember a situation where somebody actually came to me and asked me to
do something as a photographer. Now, as a managing editor of magazine we did plenty of photo
illustrations as covers, you know, knocking backgrounds out of focus so the cover text would
pop out, things like that. But never something that would make the image look like; you know
trying to send a mixed message. It’s obviously a photo illustration that’s used to sell magazines.

>> Well I think that that’s...again there is a gray area that’s really hard to address. I think that
for instance the National Geographic shot with the Pyramids...as a magazine and because of the
fact that I ran a magazine for several years I understand that you need to have that cover pop and
it’s hard because you’re talking about a photographer that may have had nothing to do with that
manipulation. They took the picture, they submitted it and the art director for the magazine
decided to go completely crazy. Now you show me a fashion magazine that doesn’t have a
completely manipulation model on the cover...and that’s kind of the thing that I disagree with is
the over manipulation of fashion magazines and sending the wrong message to people about
what bodies are supposed to look like. I understand a little retouching, if you have a blemish or a
couple of wild hairs across your face...I understand cleaning up an image, but to make them
totally different…yeah it’s not natural and it sends the wrong message to a lot of people about what we are supposed to look like, you know that’s a whole different ethical discussion. As far as the O.J. Simpson, that one is kind of tough because I feel like they did a treatment to a photograph to portray the sense of the story within. I think as a magazine, their job is to sell copies and you can’t blame the photographer for what the art department did. No as far as the stuff you’ve seen coming out of the Middle East with extra rockets being put in, that’s just absolutely unacceptable. It’s amateurish and the photoshopping was terrible and easy to see where it was manipulated and that’s just someone who has no ethics and someone that doesn’t need to be in our business. There is plenty of horrific stuff to show without having to manipulate a war photo.

>> Yeah it does, it certainly does. We had a specific incident at the TOUR where we had a Getty photographer that over manipulated some photos and ended up losing his job over it. We were to the point where we didn’t even know how many photographs were manipulated over the years he was submitting so Getty as a precaution just wiped out his entire archive from their catalog. You can’t even find his photos anymore; they expunged him from the system. It’s so important for Getty because they have been accused of manipulation many times and they are very sensitive to it, so if there is even a whisper of it they are going to go after it pretty hard. So we do discuss it, we all look at a picture and go is that a good crop? Is that too much? How’s the color? So we will kind of bounce stuff off of each other, especially between us and Getty since we are partners.

>> Well it should be the same across the board. I think sports photography is a little different; documentary photography has a little bit more of an ability to be manipulated because of the subject matters you are dealing with. With sports it’s you kind of show up and you either get the shot or you don’t. And you know as well as anyone in golf so much is based on positioning
where a volunteer might be with a quiet paddle…all of a sudden we have these issues of what makes a good photo and what make a bad photo and gosh that would have been perfect if that guy wasn’t in the background or that spectator wasn’t crossing the fairway right in the middle of the frame or if the TV camera wasn’t there. I couldn’t tell you how many amazing photos I’d have if the TV guys weren’t in the middle of the fairway or the pointer guy. I guess because I shoot with an editor’s eye, I walk away from a lot of pictures because I would rather not look at it twice or not look at it again after I’ve shot it and go yep that would have been a good picture but I can’t do anything with it. Now, the other side of that is that a lot of editorial or commercial clients from Getty will take the photos and then manipulate them. Like for instance, a win ad for Titleist where they show a player next to his golf bag…they have removed the caddie. There is almost always a caddie in those pictures and they will remove him, but that’s not an editorial use, that’s a commercial use, so it’s kind of a different thing. It is a factor in sports photography, I don’t think it’s as much of a factor because we are there just to shoot the action, get the moments and get the story out. So I think there is a little less time to have to think about what could I do to manipulate this image. You know, everything is just so deadline oriented.

>> You know I think it goes across the board from your job to your personal life to your interactions with other people. It’s kind of just do the right thing. Ethics are something that you want to have character, you want to be known as a professional that takes their job seriously, you want to be known as a trusted person, especially in our position where we have access to so many top athletes that ethics are something that you want people to know that you are trustworthy.

>> Well that’s easy because the people that are unethical make us all look bad. You know you have either the paparazzi or you have someone who is over manipulating photos it makes it into
the news and then everyone looks at you as a person with a camera and oh you’re one of those
guys. So it’s very hard for the public to tell the difference between a quality, ethical
photographer and somebody who is just trying to make a quick buck any way they can.

Brad Smith

>> Let’s see, I came into photography and photojournalism in particular through the back door. I
went off to college thinking I was going to become a veterinarian and struggled through the core
chemistry sequence with 750 other students, lecture class, and then bombed the core
chemistry…anyway, figured out the vet school probably wasn’t going to happen, but I still
thought I was going to be in the sciences, but in the meantime I’m still taking all those courses
and I started taking photos for the yearbook and then I got a job with the public affairs office
over at the University of Florida as a lab tech and then they started giving me assignments and
the more I did that the more I started to enjoy it. I took a beginning photography class in the
journalism school and the beginning photography class in the art school at Florida in the same
quarter and that kind of set my direction for the next 40 years. I continued to work in
photojournalism all through college, working for the AP, the Alligator, and the Gainesville Sun,
but I ended up being a fine arts major with an emphasis in the photography. Graduated from
Florida with my bachelor in fine arts and then went to Daytona to the community college where
they had a very intensive nuts and bolts commercial photography program and learned the nuts
and bolts of photography there while continuing to work for whoever would have me. Went job
hunting about halfway through my last semester there, um, nobody had any openings, this was
about 1984, but I interviewed all over the Southeast and a couple months into it I got a phone call
from the paper in Jacksonville saying I think we got a job for you if you’re interested and I
accepted that job and I’ve been here a little over 31 years.
>> You know, I think since I started out in the chemical and film and print days, um, It’s kinda funny because when I started out all the rage was heavy, hand of god dodging and burning back in the late 70’s and early 80’s. It influenced me a little bit, but I kind of got out of that pretty quick and that probably had a lot to do with the instructors I had in Daytona because they tended to be a little stronger fine art and documentary background then they did in the hardcore photojournalism background. So, I tended to have a little lighter hand when it came to printing in the darkroom and that’s really kind of continued, um, even as we transitioned to digital. Now we are totally digital and my approach is I want to represent what I saw the way I envisioned it. I mean there is variables in all levels of what we do from the settings on the camera to the lighting in the rooms where we are and to think the camera captures a representation of exactly what you saw, it just doesn’t happen. So, you’d have to interpret it, but my interpretation doesn’t go into the overly creative.

>> Absolutely. It’s a pretty subjective thing, it really is. I think if it reaches the point where you’re changing content by darkening an area so much that it makes distracting elements disappear or overly selectively burning in areas…again I’m working with images I shot last night while we are talking and they are pictures shot in an art gallery and you know extremely contrasty lighting, so, you know I’m lightening the images overall, I’m pulling up a little bit of shadow detail, I’m trying to make it look more like what your eye can comprehend as opposed to what a camera sensor can comprehend. But I’m not taking it some place that’s a whole different world that changes the meaning of the images or changes the content of the images.

>> I think so, honestly my standards are probably higher than theirs…I’ve always…I definitely don’t want to sound self-righteous…I kind of know what’s ok and what’s not. I’ve never felt
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overly pressured or overly tempted to do something that would take it beyond what I consider professionally, ethically acceptable.

>> Well I think it’s no one individual incident is going to bring what we do to an end, but I think there is definitely a cumulative effect on the credibility of the media and of photojournalism when that stuff goes on and the more that those things are brought to the public eye, and rightly so, the more people second guess what they are seeing, whether it’s legitimate imagery or not. That goes beyond the professional side...everyone with a cell phone and an Instagram account can tweak and manipulate and add filters and special effects and so people now are more sophisticated about what can and can’t be done to alter an image. So it means that we just really need to be on an even higher pedestal to set ourselves apart from that and I don’t know how much we do that.

>> Not like you used to because frankly on any given day I’m the only one sitting in the office at one time because there is...those kinds of conversations used to take place when we had much larger staffs and now it’s much more survival and getting your work out and getting onto the next thing. All of us are senior photographers, you know I’m 56 years old, I’ve been at the paper for 31 years, I’m the least senior photographer on staff. I take that back, I’m the youngest photographer on staff, of the four of us that are left only one has been here longer than me, but he’s the oldest one of the staff.

>> I don’t know that it should, I think there are times it certainly does. I have a real problem with...I don’t know if it’s a problem...I like long-term, long form documentary work and that’s my absolute love and I don’t get to do enough of it, but I’ve done some pretty significant projects over the years where I worked on a subject for a matter of 2, 3 or 10 years. The way I approach it is not with [inaudible] role or with an agenda, it kind of comes back to my days of being a
science nerd… I kind of go in with a theory or a hypothesis, but I don’t go in to prove it or disprove it, I mostly go in to explore it. And so I tend to go into subjects with a pretty clean slate and just let it reveal itself to me. That works for me. That’s the way I like to do it. There are certainly some amazing documentary photographers that have agendas and as long as long as they are up front about it I don’t have a problem with that. That’s just not me.

>> I’ve never found that to be a problem. It probably makes what we do more difficult. It’s also what sets us apart from your average snapshot shooter. If I don’t get the picture because something happened too fast and I wasn’t quick enough, oh well. I’m not going to say, hey would you do that one more time? Or gee, could you stand over here it would be better? I don’t do that, so yeah I could certainly, there are have been those photographers over the years that have done that and been award winners because the scene was perfect… well life’s not always perfect and now and then you get lucky. But all the pieces fall into place but usually they aren’t quite where you’d like them to be. It’s the way life is.

>> I think back to what I mentioned earlier which is when others in the profession do it, it reflects negatively on everyone in the profession and it makes people more suspect of what you’re trying to do. So on the big picture level, yes and sometimes on the street level it does to, because you have to explain to people no I don’t want you to do it over again and they are like why not? TV does that, well I’m not from TV and then they get all upset and don’t understand why they can’t.

Jack Thomas

>> When I was small my dad was an amateur so I was in the darkroom from a young age and when I did go to college I started at college newspapers and graduated from Western Washington University with a bachelors in journalism. Most of us in that situation kind of teach ourselves
photography because it’s not a dedicated photojournalism track at most colleges. So you kind of figured out that yourself and did it in film, at least through about 2000. So the whole idea of manipulation is still kind of strange, back in those days, because you actually had to take out a pair of scissors and cut a print and paste it on another one or things like that, so that wasn’t a major concern. Maybe back in the film days you could say that the major concerns were manipulating before the photo was taken as opposed to manipulation of the photo itself. So setting up things that aren’t realistic, you know posing people doing things they would never do that are not immediately obvious to the reader, that kind of thing and I’ve been at the Spokesman Review in Spokane, Washington for 26 years, so that’s about it.

>>You know most of us came up as members of the NPPA (National Press Photographers Association) so we kind of looked at their guidelines, but it was drilled into us from an early age that journalists carry a unique responsibility to transmit the truth, capture the truth, present it as truth, so you don’t manipulate and for a young photographer you have to figure out if I’m not going to manipulate the scene where do I have to be to capture what’s going on and only do it that way…But yeah, we all kind of come up with our own comfort zone that we stay inside of and it’s gotten more challenging once you could easily manipulate photos digitally, but newspaper are uniquely serious about the business. They don’t think about the advertising, promotion, you know we’re not making “click bait” we’re just making photos that go with stories that come from news events, that sort of thing, so we’re super serious about it and that’s probably the overall newspaper perspective.

>>Well I would say that we all saw the earliest digital manipulation things with the cover of Day in the Life books and a few other things and said ok that’s too far…so they basically came from other people stepping over the line that most of us said ok I wouldn’t do that and I wouldn’t do
that. And then newspapers have had a few high-profile situations where somebody manipulated something and they got fired. If I were to manipulate something, take something out of a photo, add something to a photo I’d be fired. So it’s happened a number of times, it’s never happened at our newspaper, but there were times when we suspected something was manipulated and we went and looked at it and said ok it was a miracle or just a strange scene or something and I would say that the tendency if we’re talking about sports…I mean the main thing was can you put the ball in if it’s not in the frame? That’s probably one of the biggest urges, but we all saw it happened with the Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding…Anyway Nancy Kerrigan the darling figure skater gets hit on knee by a thug hired by Tonya Harding’s boyfriend and suddenly it was this dramatic soap opera. Then when they went for the Olympic trials, I think it was in New York, they were saying what’s going to happen when Nancy sees Tonya out on the ice? During practice the first day they stayed away from each other, they didn’t say anything to each other. There was this huge soap opera going on and I think it was the New York News Day Photoshopped a picture of Nancy Kerrigan skating beside Tonya Harding and it fit, it fit the story, but it completely was fabricated and manufactured and a lot of us said ok, we’re not going to do that, But, when you’ve got the pressures of big media all trying to scoop each other, someone is going to step over a line you’re not comfortable with. The other thing sports photographers do and get away with most of the time is just heavy burning and dodging to make the action more apparent in the photo. Most of us just roll our eyes at that as kind of a holdover from the darkroom days. Everybody is sitting in the background and you don’t have enough separation so you used to burn them way down and nowadays you go into Photoshop and you select the background and you put it out of focus because you were shooting with say an f5.6 lens and if you were shooting it at f2.8 they would have been more out of focus and let’s roll our eyes at that…that’s probably
not a fire able offense but we’re all pretty sophisticated now, we know what’s going on, it’s not a question of what happened in the situation.

>>You know I think we all kind of look at it as a matter of degree. As you’re sitting there working on a picture you say we’ve got a complicated background but good action, what can I do to make that action more apparent? Most of us we know in our hearts when it crosses over the line, but say if you’re going to throw the background a little out of focus, not general over 50, say 60%, when you get up to 100% and then if you go over a radius of 1 then it starts to look really hokey and really it’s about the bond of trust with your reader, you know? Is the reader going to see it and go oh that’s not real at all? Certainly there are times when readers will comment on our pictures on the website and say oh that’s not real, you made that up…and it’s like, you know, we didn’t make that up but someone along the line convinced you that that’s what we do and certainly if you’re online anywhere near the “click bait” that just rolls out of these shops all day long you realize that no one cares about what picture gets stuck with whatever “click bait” they are trying to sell. People get jaded and their expectations are lowered and they just assume newspaper people do the same thing. So when you see a “click bait” story about angry football player tells his coach to stick it or whatever and then you see a picture of just an angry face, you’re 99% sure that’s not the guy in the story and that the story is overblown, so the internet vernacular has ruined the reader’s trust in photographers and occasionally a photographer does it; hopefully not me.

>>You know, we’re like a lot of papers…most of us have over 20 years in the business because over the years as the staff has declined it’s kind of last hired first fired sort of thing, so what ends up being is us older guys we enforce our own code of ethics that way we do not sign anything and if we did something really questionable we would be called into the editor’s office and I
can’t ever remember that happening. If we are called into the editor’s office it’s not about photo manipulation, bit might be about conduct, you know someone gets into a shouting match with somebody who doesn’t want you to take their picture or something like that. Again it’s not written…there are some general written guidelines that aren’t specific to photographers, but we don’t sign anything; we just know when somebody steps over.

>>The main thing is we crop and we tone our photos…that’s it! And those of us from the film days often darken our corners to give it just a little bit of vignette, hopefully not obvious, and that’s for eye stop. So it would be easy to add a little bit of blur on a background or something. But if it’s not a great photo, don’t try to make it into one. People do that all the time and it just looks ham-handed and you say ok, there’s a 25 year old who is doing something like that and it’s not that you’re a bad photographer; you just get crappy backgrounds occasionally. Well, everybody puts effort into taking the photo and certainly autofocus and digital formats like RAW help you to control tones and things, but if you’re in a situation where you can’t get a clean background, you can’t go find it later. Certainly with enough experience if you’ve edited say 100 ballgames of whatever sport where you have 500 frames or more you start to realize what’s in your take and what’s not, so you have to accept what you get and sometimes you end up editing and going to the sports desk and saying you know the peak action is this picture but it’s so muddy and you can’t find the ball and it’s the background I would go with just the jubilation photo after the score, so editing, you edit around messy photos rather than go and find the gem in there.

>>You know I don’t think so, people have suggested to me that I do that, but again we’re just overly serious in the newspaper business so we’re not tempted to do that. But when you’re sitting in the workroom at a major sporting event whether it’s NCCA football or NCAA basketball and
you’re in there with 20 guys…it used to be that 18 of those guys worked for newspapers or AP and couple guys are shooting for the college or something. Now there’s like two newspaper guys in there, one AP guy like 15 or 16 guys shooting for the college, they are shooting for agencies, promotional publications and those guys are doing completely different stuff. They’ll see a good action photo but it’s messy and they will put a glow around the player like it’s a sports card whereas the rest of us are like I caught that same action and it’s going in the paper just like that even though it’s kind of boring. So the atmosphere in the workroom as completely different now and you have to kind of figure out how to make your stuff unique and unique enough that you don’t feel pressure to put stuff on so you’re taking the fastest lens that you have…if you have an 85 1.4, you take that to the game and you shoot under the basket at a basketball game and your pictures do look different than everyone else’s and you get into the right place for the right background and then hopefully make a better picture.

>>> I’ve realized that…that’s a magazine, we’re a newspaper, we’re two different things. Then there’s books and newspapers: two different things. I just feel they are chipping away at my credibility because one day I’m going to get just an incredible picture and half the people on the street won’t believe that I shot it exactly that way. And so it takes away from us in very, very small ways. So I was kind of disgusted with National Geographic, because…but then they talk about the cover of a magazine as an ad for what’s inside, not an actual news photo, but on the other hand Geographic isn’t on the newsstand for the most part, it goes out to subscribers. So we all kind of debated that and again rolled out eyes and just went about our work. But, occasionally you get something so amazing like a hostage situation, someone leaping out of a fire or something and everybody goes oh that’s not real and then it has to go onto say your newspaper website and right below the story with your unbelievable photo is a bunch of “click bait” about
the bikinis on actresses and foods you should never eat or they will give you cancer in 10 seconds and all that crap. It’s very much a mixed message as it rolls out digitally.

>>I mean we talk about each other’s photos. There was an older photographer who retired two years ago and he was just clumsy and ham-handed at hand of god burning. So we kind of joked about it when he wasn’t around and he retired and he was kind of an AD/HD fellow who would do it and we’d say you know that’s kind of heavy handed…no it’s fine…so we didn’t, we called him on it occasionally. But we realized he was just from an old school and could not change his ways and we love him like a brother, but glad he’s not doing that anymore and is retired.

>>Well you know we all call the sports part of the newspaper the toy department because when you look at what we call the six news values, you know conflict, consequence, human interest all that kind of stuff, the one thing that’s missing is consequence. You win, you lose no one dies, no one bleeds at the end of the day. So I don’t see it as big a deal because you’re in that room and everyone is processing their photos and somebody steps over the line and you think ok that’s over the line, I wouldn’t do that, but chances are it’s not going to change anyone’s life the next day, it just looks ham-handed. So I would say there is less to talk about there, but sports photography is relatively new, you didn’t have ISO 400 film until like the early 60’s, so to actually freeze…think back to the oldest basketball photos you can see, maybe in the 40’s and they’re direct flash with a bulb on a Graflex…I mean this is a fairly new field and to actually catch indoor basketball even in the 90’s when we were out there shooting Kodak P3200 film at 50,000 ISO, it just wasn’t even practical, none of us showed those photos to anybody in our portfolio because they were just so bad. Now any guy with enough money can walk onto a court in an indoor sport and they can take a decent photo. Most people need an 80-200 2.8…they may get a Canon Rebel for Christmas with a kit lens on it that goes to 5.6, they’re not going to be in
the photo market they’re just going to be trying to catch a picture of their kid. But the one that goes and buys the 80-200, now he’s getting serious. You’re going to see his pictures or her pictures on posters and newsletters and stuff and they’re going to start playing with them and maybe start doing things that call into question everything I do because maybe they get a picture of their kid doing a wheel kick in soccer and then they Photoshop the ball in and then I get a picture of a guy doing the wheel kick and the ball is about half way out and somebody goes oh this guy got a better picture than you. So everything is called into question once different motivations are used in the Photoshopped pictures.

>>I don’t think so. When I tell…I have taught photojournalism at times and I tell people there are pictures that are right in the middle of the story. So I say it’s like concentric circles, there are pictures that are right in the middle of the story. If you’re doing a story about heroin addiction, you know have a story of a heroin addict shooting up or passing out after shooting up you’re right in the middle. And then if you get a picture of a former addict, oh that’s a little farther from the story. And if you get a picture of a counselor that works with addicts then you’re getting farther away. But, the push, the push to get to that very center of the concentric circle is what causes you to step over a line. So we did a story several years ago, not me, but one of our photographers did story about meth addicts. She had several pictures of people lighting up, partying, passing out and all kinds of stuff. People were pretty assured that that was all set up and fake and this woman that did it is probably one of the most gifted documentary photographer we’ve ever known and yet all of her work was called into question. But on the other hand she also slept on the floor of some drug houses waiting for a picture to happen in the middle of the night, so ethics made her do that rather than try to make it happen at another hour. But, I don’t think of that in terms of sports. Sports to me is whether it’s in the locker room where no fan can
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR DIGITAL MANIPULATION OF SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY

go at halftime or whether it’s out on the court, you’re still trying to just show the sport and do it hopefully with respect and verity and all the things you want to happen in photojournalism.

>>Yeah and as I’ve talked about, most people that step over the line are outside of newspaper photojournalism, so they’re in some more commercially-oriented type of photojournalism or they’re in some kind of PR, promotion or advertising or whatever or “click bait” type of thing and I’d say they’re not taking anything from me but they’re putting something into the reader that’s going to make them doubt me later and you just have to watch your P’s and Q’s and the way you’re doing things and every photographer has called up a series of photos from a game and he just missed, you know, a great play, a key play that ought to be in the newspaper the next day but the ball is out of the frame or the background is too messy and you can’t see the ball. So you sit there and that urge to have had the perfect photo it complicates it sometimes, but us older guys we say oh I missed it and then go to the next sequence and keep trying.

Paul Kramer

>> Well I got started in photography, really when I was going to Flagler College. I took a few photo classes and then that’s where I fell in love with photography and just started doing it more and more. Once I graduated school I was doing graphic design and my photography on the side and just doing a bunch of freelance for the St. Augustine Record and also just doing sports photography for local companies that do youth sports: baseball, football, softball, soccer, etc. etc…where I feel like I learned a lot, a little bit, photographing events that aren’t big time if you will, sort of just practicing, refining, just getting better at seeing things and understanding sports a little bit and now I currently freelance for the NFL and AP Images and then of course a couple companies around St. Augustine and Jacksonville, Florida. I got my break with the NFL really through a classified ad on a website called Sports Shooter. At the time they were just looking for
an assistant for the Super Bowl in Tampa, which would have been 2008 or 2007, it was the game between Pittsburgh and Arizona; I think it was 43. So with that event, at the time before I started working with them I had a chance to freelance with the Record and was able to go to a couple Jags games and was able to make a few connections with some team photographers for the Broncos and also the Cleveland Browns and kind of assist them when they came to Jacksonville, running memory cards and just kind of shadowing them a little bit. The NFL gig popped up for that event and I was able to say that I worked with a couple NFL photographers and within sports a lot of photographers use Photo Mechanic which is a software where you organize and caption photographs and I had experience with that, so I feel like those little few experience with the NFL guys and knowledge of Photo Mechanic somehow set me apart from some other people and that’s how I got in with the NFL and I’ve been working with them ever since. Just me kind of running memory cards and editing the Super Bowl, which is a pretty good first gig and it’s just been ever since then. I think the fist game I shot…I shot a few regular season games for them the following few years and then I think in Indianapolis, whatever Super Bowl that would have been was the first game I was like photographing for them. So this coming, for the 5th Super Bowl, this will be my 7th Super Bowl I’ve attended, 4th one or this may be the 5th one I’ve photographed, so it’s pretty crazy to see the evolution and even how much as changed with the NFL in regard to photography and [inaudible] when I first started in 2007 when I first started.

>> I don’t really do, to be honest, much adjusting at all. My boundaries are just adjusting levels and that’s about it, just getting the contrast a little bit better. I don’t…and you can crop, you can crop a picture too and cropping and just like level adjustments just to kind of get the color right. But other than that, I really do not do much retouching because that’s my boundary right there, there’s a fine line between what you can and can’t do. You want things to be as true and
representative as possible and I don’t want to cross that boundary of touching things out or
cropping someone’s hand out that may be interfering with the picture, cuz you could easily do
that with Photoshop today, move hands and feet and things that don’t make the picture look that
good, but then you cross that threshold and once you cross that threshold I feel like there is no
going back, so you just kind of draw a line in the sand, but of course sometimes people get in the
way, so you just have to be careful.

>> I feel like all has stayed the same, uh, for me anyways because I feel like I’m an ethical
person and don’t want to push the bounds of editorial work in any way so I really haven’t had
any issues with that. I mean again, with the technology changing it could easily allow you to do
these things and I just do not want to cross that line. Like 10 years ago Photoshop was not what
Photoshop is today. We take a lot more time to make these adjustments and changes but now it’s
literally like the click of a button and you can change things and you just don’t want to go there.

>> I believe it can go to far…again it’s a fine line I feel of what you can and can’t do because at
some point you are going to cross the threshold of becoming, um, it’s not what it was at the time
that you took that picture, so you have to be extremely careful on how far, especially potentially
with burning and dodging and image. But, I don’t think doing contrast and levels is necessarily
unethical because I feel like almost everyone is doing it and cameras to an extent don’t always
have the best contrast in some cases depending on where you are…you can do that with film
even, back in the day, so I don’t think it’s unethical to be honest with you, within reason.

>> I haven’t had to sign anything with the NFL and I’m just a contributor with the AP and I
know the AP has guidelines as well, so there are guidelines that people have to adhere by, so I
just kind of apply those same guidelines that AP would have, that Getty would have across the
board when you’re doing any type of editorial work.
Yeah, if it’s beyond levels and cropping I don’t go there. I mean, I don’t do any burning or dodging when I’m editing strictly just adjust the levels ever so slightly and just crop pictures and that’s really my max of what I’ll do. And another reason that’s my max is the deadline is so tight on these pictures that you do not have time to even do some of that, so you’re trying to get all this stuff as correct as possible within camera, you do not have to do any post-production work. So, that’s kind of where I draw the line and keep it at for my editing.

Not that I’m aware of, not in regards to editorial work.

Well it’s pretty disappointing a little bit that someone wouldn’t stand up to what they no isn’t correct and have their own moral standards to say no because I think if you know something is wrong you would have to voice your opinion instead of just hiding it and doing what someone said and so you feel bad and wish they would have said no, but at the same time it’s their fault to some extent for just allowing it to happen.

I’ve had it happen a few times, it’s not something that people bring up all the time, but you have guys, I mean I can recall a few weeks ago at a game and it wasn’t in regards to cropping or levels adjusting by any means, but it was hey should I include this picture of the football player, he did not make the catch, should I submit it to the wire or not? It was a great frame, but the player did not make the catch, it looked like he made the catch…personally I would not upload the picture because he did not make the catch, but if you feel the need to upload it then you need to be crystal clear in the caption what happened, so of course within the caption, that’s also ethical standards there, how you identify what happened during that play or that event and misrepresenting it. So, another area that people don’t think about sometimes is how to caption or identify what’s happening or taking place in the picture.
>> I would say it should play the same across the board because you’re all in the editorial, event, and photojournalism realm, so I believe that sports should be the same as going out and documenting a Presidential race or a war in a country should be the same standards applied throughout them all and not one more ethical than the other. They should have the same playing field.

>> I would say [ethics] are kind of a cushion to lean on. I mean, you know there are rules and guidelines, so that helps you not break any boundaries and keep everything honest and fair.

>> I think it’s just misrepresenting what actually took place and someone can kind of compare you work to the person that may be unethical and you know you have done everything correctly, but being misrepresented by someone who went across that boundary of being unethical and not being realistic so that’s where it would be hard to make the comparison a little bit.