

‘How has the creation of social media affected the professional photography and how has photographic manipulation evolved with this?’

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Summary of Topic

Ever since photography was invented, people have been manipulating their photos, whether that be when taking the photo, or in post-production when processing the image or editing it. This has become more popular in the last decade with the creation of social media and the rising number of cameras. As people are seeing more edited photos on a daily basis, this has affected the general mental health of many people. This writing will be looking at these topics and answering questions of why this has happened.

Introduction

In this thesis, I aim to find out how social media has affected the professional photography world; has it had a good affect or not, and how people show their work and themselves to the world through the many social media platforms. I am going to be looking at the history of editing and manipulating photos, looking at artists that either edited the negative of their photo or manipulated the scenario of the photo when shooting it, and how this change the way people viewed photography. The development and creation of cameras will also be discussed as this is an important part of how photography has developed throughout the years, when photography became a more viable technology, did it change what people though was a 'perfect' look. Looking into how the idea of photography has changed throughout the years, from going from something that mainly only professionals did to photography becoming a ubiquitous medium that proliferated everyday life. How has photography gone from truth to fiction. My thesis proposes to ask the question 'how has this transition affected us as humans?'. I will also be taking about my own work and practice and how this relates to the topics I am talking about.

Chapter One – Historical Manipulation

Photography was once perceived as showing the truth and changed the way people viewed the world, as photographs were a direct depiction of a scene. With this stereotype about photography, photographers were able to manipulate or fake their photos easily, with changing the environment or scenario that is depicted, but also by changing the photo once the negative had been developed.



Fig1.



Fig 2.

As depicted in Fig one and Fig two, the first photo to be recognised as altered was Calvert Jones' *Capuchin Friars* (1846), showing four Friars; three standing and one sitting, which when viewed as a positive image you only see four Friars, whereas within the negative you can see an extra figure which has been painted over with Indian ink (Cilia, 2020). When looking at Fig 1, you would not think that there should be an extra figure within the frame, which after investigation photographer Daniel Cilia found out that it was a statue instead of an extra Friar (2020). With this information it makes more sense of why Jones wanted to remove it as it does not fit well into the composition of the photo with the four Friars.

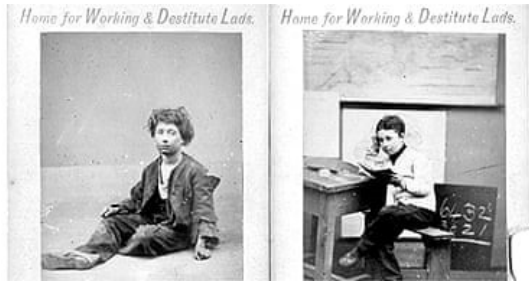


Fig 3.

In the 1870s, charity *Barnardo's* had a campaign called *Hard Working Lads*, which depicted orphan children before and after they have been in Dr T.J Barnardo's care. After this campaign was released, Dr Barnardo appeared in court after the public felt like he had deceived them, eventually Barnardo conceded that he had deceived them (Wells, 1996). In the 19th century; when these campaigns where produced, photography was seen as showing the truth which many people believed but towards the end of the 19th century and early 20th century, photographers started to get creative with the medium.

Another case of photographer manipulation is Roger Fenton's *Valley of the Shadow of Death* (1855), which depicts a pair of photos showing a small valley filled with cannonballs.



Fig 4



Fig 5

There is one big difference between these two photos, Fig 4 shows cannonballs on the road in the right second of the image, whereas in Fig 5 those cannonballs are missing. This made

people think that Fenton staged one of the photos to make it look like a different time or day. Many people investigated into the subject, with filmmaker Errol Morris traveling to the location and tried to replicate the environment and scenario Felton would have been in (Green, 2020). Eventually optical engineer Dennis Purcell was able to determine that the first image was manipulated, after noticing a group of small rocks had been moved, caused by people walking over them when moving the cannonballs (Green, 2020).

Looking at these examples, Dr Barnardo and Roger Fenton did not have the intention of manipulating or deceiving the public with their work, but with manipulating the layout and content of the photo, both have done this. With the *Barnardo's* case, the fact that he manipulated the photos seems more harmful as the campaign is for a charity and was used to help raise money. Whereas with Roger Fenton's *Valley of the Shadow of Death* (1855), he was trying to show the aftermath of a war and not looking for sympathy. Looking at all three examples, it seems like photography never truly showed truth and reality, photographers had as much leeway with their photos as painters and artists have with their paintings. Subjects like these show that a photograph is 'employed to fashion the world according to the intension of the person making it' (Ritchin, 2013, p.7) taking away the credibility of photography. Society uses photos as a way of showing memory, but with the idea that photography is false and only shows fiction, these become a representation of our memory, having been filtered through the eyes of many people (Fontcuberta, 2014).

For many years, physical manipulating photos was only an option for professional photographers as they had the skills and equipment to achieve these, but when digital photography started it gave a chance for amateur photographers to edit their photos in 'post-production'.

An example of non-photographers manipulating photos are the *Cottingley Fairies* photos. These were a series of photos created by two young girls, Elsie Wright, and Frances Griffiths, trying to convince their parents that fairies exist, but they eventually got the attention of Edward L. Gardner and Arthur Conan Doyle, who used some of the photos in his book *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922) (Harding, 2005). For decades these photos were seen as showing real fairies and proving that fairies were real.



Fig 6

It wasn't until the 1980's these photos were properly investigated. Geoffrey Crawley, who was the photo science consultant at *Amateur Photographer*, tested the original cameras the two girls used to see if they could produce clean crisp photos that were used by Gardner and Conan Doyle. Crawley determined that the photos were not able to create these sharp photos and that they would have been altered in the darkroom (Fox, 2010). With this information, it was enough to see that the photos could be partially manipulated, but

eventually Elsie, who was in her later years of life, confessed that the fairies were fake and were just paper cut outs from books. Frances kept up with the idea that the fairies were real until her death in 1986 (Fox, 2010).

The *Cottingley Fairies* (1917) are one of the oldest examples of manipulation we can connect with amateur photographers today, as it was just two young girls having fun, but also with the fact that they kept up the facade for decades just like some people deny their edited photos, even if there is clear evidence. It is interesting to see that the photos from the professional photographers were debunked or rejected quicker than the amateur photos showing that just because you are a professional doesn't mean that you are able to convince people with your work.

Chapter Two – Modern day Manipulation and Social Media

Photography became more available in 1888, George Eastman produced a hand-held camera after creating light sensitive paper in 1884 (Wells, 1996). The camera had a 100 exposure roll of film and once finished, the camera with the roll of film inside would be sent away to a factory to get developed. While the film was being developed, the camera would be reloaded and sent back to the customer (Fineman, 2004). With the creation of this camera, the idea of 'amateur photography' became a concept, separating the professional photographers who had worked before this invention and the public who picked up photography as a hobby. With this happening, photography became more of an artform but kept its documentary style as people were making family memories they could look back on physically.

The idea of digital photography only started to circle in the 1970's and 1980's when *Texas Instruments* patented their film-less camera in 1972 and *Sony* released their *Mavica* electronic camera in 1981. These cameras are far different from the cameras we use today as they were seen more as a television camera instead of general photography cameras (Hand, 2012). With this new development in photography, it gave people new ways of creating art but would also give people more ways of manipulating their work. Over the past couple of decades, cameras have become more common in everyday technology, mainly phones but also objects such as computers, this has become so common that it seems absurd when they don't have a camera built-in (Hand, 2012). With this development, the line between professional and amateur photography has become blurred as photography has become as simple as pressing a trigger to produce a photo instead of having to deal with aperture and shutter speeds. Editing your photos is also easier as most camera apps have editing options built in with most baseline editing options.

With these developments in photographic technology, development in online sharing has also increased with the development of social media, such as *Facebook* and *Instagram*, sharing photos has become easier. These elements have also brought along the concept of the 'selfie'. With these new aspect in people lives, they are able to show themselves to the world in their own way, having the public see them as they want to be seen, even if this is not the truth. An aspect that is talked about when mentioning the social photo is the self 'that feeling that you are you and not someone else' (Jurgenson,2019) which many people try and show in their photos, and even though the idea of the self has been around for decades, it seems to fit more with current photo habits than when looking at old portraits from when photography started. When looking at a photo of someone that you don't know,

it is hard to tell if they are portraying themselves the way they should or in a way that they want to be perceived even if that portrayal is false, this can span from editing the way they look to showing a fake reality of their life through editing or manipulating the scenario when the photo was taken.

One photographer that took advantage of these developments in photography was Damon Winter, who in 2010 won an award for his war photographs that had a faux-vintage look to them (Jurgenson, 2019).



Fig 7

Fig 7 shows an army soldier surrounded by his gear, but the aspect that stands out is the look of the photo: the square frame with white border, the slight discolouration in the centre of the frame, and just over all muted colours. All these attributes are from a vintage camera app called *Hipstamatic*, which Winters used to take the photos on his phone (Winter, 2010). These photos were one of the first examples of professional photographers

to use these types of filters over them, which at the time were only being used by social media users as they are usually built into those apps. Winter said, 'Using the phone is discreet and casual and unthreatening' (Winter, 2010) when talking about why he chose to use his phone instead of an SLR, which adds to the feel that these photos could have been taken by anyone, not a professional photographer.

Celebrities, such as the Kardashian family, are all over social media and are the main group that we see edited photos from. They edit their photos to have what is preserved as the perfect body: skinny waist, wide hips, perfect skin. People look up to these people and base their looks on whether their body matches theirs.



Fig 8

The Kardashians are one of the biggest culprits of editing their photos to seem more desirable, with many of these being bad edits such as Fig 8, which is a picture of Kylie Jenner showing off a skinny waist and wide hips. If you were just scrolling past the image, you wouldn't notice the evidence of the editing done to the image. On the left portrait third of the photo, you can see that the wall has warped to the centre of the photo, in line with Jenner's waist, showing that she has pinched her waist in when altering the photo. Images like these we see every day when scrolling through social media, especially *Instagram* which seem to be the most popular social media website.

When comparing the differences between Fig 7 and Fig 8 in context of why they shot and edited their photos the way they did, Winters chose this as it was convenient for him using his phone and by using the *Hipstamatic* app, it skipped all the editing he would have had to do in Photoshop to get the same look. Whereas Kylie Jenner did it for aesthetic and to have the 'perfect' look to stand out against others even if what she is showing is false.

Chapter Three – Social Media's Effect on Mental Health

Seeing edited and manipulated photos, mainly photos of people often celebrities, cannot be good for people's mental health, especially teenagers and young adults. With the ever-increasing easiness of being able to edit and share your photos to your liking, it has become a daily thing for people to do and see without thinking about the affects it could have on other people seeing their photos. The concept of social media sites is only a relatively new concept, with 2004 being the year *Facebook* was founded (Pantic, 2014) and many other sites being founded shortly after, such as *Instagram* and *Snapchat*. Many of these social media sites have been linked with 'narcissistic traits, loneliness, anxiety, depression and

poor body image' (McCrory, Best and Maddock, 2022) within the adolescent and young adult community that use social media. Things such as likes, and positive comments gives many people motivations but there are also the negative aspects such as negative comments that counteract these positive rewards (McCrory, Best and Maddock2022). Filters are also a new concept that came with the rise of social media, which are overlays you put over an image that alters the look of it, like having a pre-set when editing photos. Many of these filters just put silly animations over your face, like a unicorn horn or a dog face, but many also manipulate the structure of people's faces, such as changing the size of people noses to changing the colour of people's eyes. This, and drastically editing photos, has created a line between the use of social media and eating disorders, as using technology to fix flaws shows a reluctance to accepting that the way you look is normal and would rather get closer to the more 'socially acceptable' way of looking (Wick and Keel, 2020). With a good majority of the people on social media being teens and young adult, seeing images like Fig 8 can do more damage than the people posting these photos think, as they don't see the other side of the screen.

Digital artist Mick Campau explores the idea of social media in his project *Antisocial* (2018), which looks at how anti-social social media can be (Harris, 2018). These sticking images show of what many social media sites are when you isolate a post away from everything else, this shows the affects these sites have on us in a very simple way.



Fig 9

The collection of photos show empty car parks with bright lights depicting different social media post. Fig 9 is one that stood out to me the most, as it shows the effect social media can have on a person when on these sites, showing that to be cool and liked you need followers which over time, the need increase. These pieces of artwork show the behind the scenes look at social media posts and what people would actually like to say to people without the barrier of the computer or phone screen.

With the phrases used in these art works, most people wouldn't blink an eye at it as these have become normal for some people online, looking for attention from people they don't know. Works like these are individual in their own way but are still something you would see on social media, with the bright colours similar to many artists works online, as these are the types of images that get people attention when scrolling past many other photos.

Another artist that has looked at social media and used it within her work is artist Amalia Ulman with her project *Excellence and Perfections* (2014). This project showed a partial fictionalised lifestyle that followed many peoples lifestyles on social media, Ulman showed the aftermath of a breast augmentation (which was fake), to her being on a strict diet and exercising, doing this made her profile into the expected visuals that many social medias want (Kerr, 2017).



Fig 10

This series of photos show how obsessed people can get to fit-in online, changing their lifestyle and the way they look so that they can seem to be more 'normal' and accepted online even if they are not showing their true self. The image and caption in Fig 10 will seem

very familiar to people as this is the type of imagery and wording that we see on social media almost every day, from the framing of the image to the discount code in the caption. Ulmans work is showing the mask that people put on and show to the world whereas Campau is showing more of the behind the scenes view of social media, the things we don't say online, showing our true selves and thoughts. Both subjects are important to talk about as both can be just as harmful as the other, not showing your true self can be harmful to the people viewing your photos with the un-known side can be damaging to yourself as you are faking who you are and trying to make yourself into the 'perfect' person.

Looking at these examples (Fig 9 and Fig 10) it is easy to connect why social media has affected people's mental health and the way they view themselves, with Ulman's work commenting on the beauty culture of *Instagram* and with Campau's work commenting on what people really think, with most of it being negative.

In general, artist; such as Cindy Sherman and her *Instagram* selfies, have taken a look at social media and are making work that show their point of view and what they think about social media.

Chapter Four – My Own Practice

Social media can be great for some photographers, it gets your work out into the world easily and is a great way of attracting clients, but for me, social media is just another thing I would have to consider when creating my work.

My current work is looking at how time affect nature and does this affect the beauty of it. This seems to be opposite with what we see on social media with people trying to reverse their aging and stop it with plastic surgery, we very rarely see people age naturally today.



Fig 11

Fig 11 shows my photobook *Dune 1* (2022), this consists of photos of plants on the dunes of Swansea beach, which will have multiple other books following it with photos taken in the same place, showing the effects of time. This is to show that the effect of time is natural and that everything will go through the same cycle of life.

This work is being presented in multiple photobooks, as this fits the work the best, but it also gives time for people to view the work. Social media is too fast for how I want my work to be viewed as most people would probably scroll right past it without thinking as it wouldn't catch their eyes that have been trained to focus on the bright colours that crowd social media sites. You can take your time when viewing a photobook as you have no distractions, such as other people's posts and ads, you are able to fully take in the imagery and take a close look at it. Also, the act of turning the pages slow you down and could have

an impact on the book itself, aging it, giving it more character, showing that other people have seen it based on the way the work looks and not based on likes and comments you see on every social media post. Also, the fact that it has very limited writing within the books; the only writing being the description of the area the photos were taken at, leaves your full focus on the photos instead of some 'inspirational' writing and discount codes of social media posts.



Fig 12



Fig 13

For the project Fig 11 is from, I started of working with flower bouquets and looking at how they age through time. These photos (Fig 12 and Fig 13) taken on the more literal sense of how time affects something with a photo being taken every day. Looking at each photo carefully to see what has changed about the flowers slows you down the same way looking at the book in Fig 11 does, slowly taking in the small details of the photos. The photos were going to be put into little flip book style photobooks so then you could view the images as a

sort of stop motion sequence. But these photos do fall into the argument that they all look the same and that there isn't much difference between each one.

Photos on social media feel rushed, inauthentic and follow the regime that social media has, with the bright colours and warm tones to an image, also the content of the photo being something you would see multiple times on *Instagram* or *Pinterest*, many of them looking identical i.e., sunset landscapes or photos with monuments. My own work feels slower and in-depth, being the opposite of what you would see online, having taken thought and care of what I was going to photograph and how I was going to layout my photobooks, with the different layouts throughout the books keeping you interested instead of having the same format throughout the book like *Instagram's* square format.

Many works on social media fit into the professional photography world while still hitting all of the marks for the social media algorithm, as social media, especially *Instagram*, has become a popular way of getting your photos seen by many people.

Conclusion

After having done this research, I can conclude that the creation and introduction of social media has affected professional photography and photography in general as it has given people the power of sharing their photos easier than it has ever been. The evolution of the camera, going from a piece of equipment that only professionals would have, to about everyone always having one in their pocket, turning it from a solely professional artform to an artform that has no restrictions, something that everyone can do. This also gave more of a variety of photos that were being produced, taking away from the documentary origins photography had.

Having looked at historical examples of manipulating photos, it shows that photography always had a level of fiction to it, not full truthiness. As photography is a physical art, you were always able to manipulate the photos to a certain extent; it was just done differently and at a less frequency as it is done today. Old, manipulated photos were either painted over: such as the *Capuchin Friars* (1846), or were manipulated when shooting the photo, such as *Valley of the Shadow of Death* (1855), now we see people change their body shapes and just the way they look in general in post-production. This has created an ideology of what the 'perfect' body is, which most of the time cannot be achieved without plastic surgery, with celebrities such as Kylie Jenner promoting this look. The rising numbers of these edited photos has been linked with a decline in the younger generation's mental health, with self-esteem issues and eating disorders rising.

Social media has given people the chance to share their work to a wider audience than ever before, for both professional and amateur photographers, but this has mixed the two together, making it difficult to differ between the two. Amateur photographer's work fits the social media algorithm, catching the eyes of the viewer more than what a trained professional would, with their bright and bold colours, and the trendy content of the photo. But social media and the affects it has on people, has given the photography world many ideas to work with, creating project and pieces of work surrounding the idea that to please your audience you must follow what everyone else is doing online. The ideology that social media has, has mainly been created by celebrities who have already altered their body physically, and who are also edit on top of that to make their body seem even more 'perfect'. The editing style and filters have been utilised by professional photographers, such as Damon Winter and his faux-vintage war photos, but this then brings in the conversation of whether this is appropriate to use in the professional world as he is skipping a good

chunk of work when using the *Hipstematic* app. But in the past couple of years, other artists have started to use social media and the body changing editing, such as Cindy Sherman with her drastically edited selfies, showing her perspective of selfies today.

Overall, I do think that creation of social media has affected the professional photography as it has given a platform for everyone to post their photos. The advances in photographic manipulation have had more of an affect as it has changed the idea that photography showed the truth and reality, but eventually changed to being partially fictional.

Photography is in a strange place in its timeline, stuck between analogue and digital. It has been moving towards a more digital approach in the past decade, but many photographers still like to have that physical aspect of photography, with still using large format or film, and to have a physical portfolio rather than an online one. Social media will be around for a long time and will have more developments to what we see today, whether this be a good thing or a bad thing, but many arts will change with it, including photography.

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