

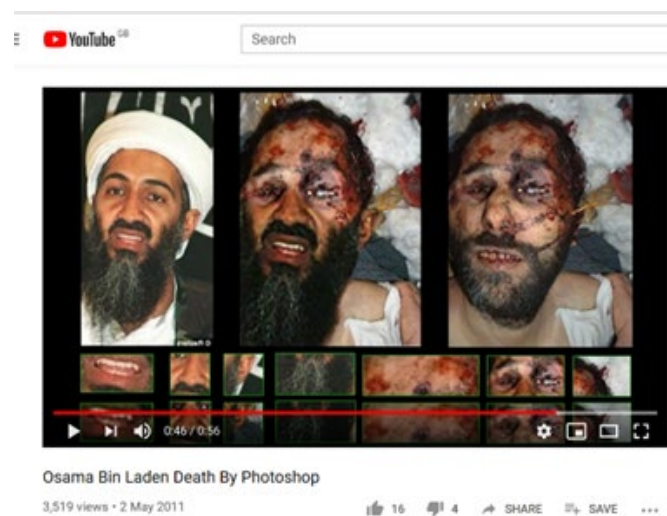
## The ethics of image manipulation in Journalism

The definition of image manipulation is 'The application of image-editing techniques to photographs in order to create an illusion or deception' (yourdictionary; lovetoknow)

My essay will discuss the ethics of image manipulation in Journalism with different photographs ranging from a political and editorial point of view with the likes of Osama Bin Laden, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, OJ Simpson and Oprah.

Osama Bin Laden was killed on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2011 by a gunshot wound after being killed by a United States military special operations unit, shortly after 1:00pm (local time) and 4:00pm (eastern time) (History.com editors; HISTORY; 2011). The photograph of Osama Bin Laden shown below (Yahya76; YouTube; 2011) shows an ethical approach, for example, the left

photograph shows an ordinary photo of Osama Bin Laden, taken in 1998 and the right photograph shows another individual's body, the composite of both photographs is shown in the middle photograph which is clearly photoshopped because it shows a bloodied image of a man with matted hair and a blank, half-opened eye (Amelia Hill; The Guardian; 2011). The photos below the three show how much it has been photoshopped, for example, there are blurred edges on the beard, a difference in sharpness between the eyes and mouth and his beard is darker than the original image who has a few grey hairs for an aging man (Internet munch; Ebaum's world; 2011).



Yahya76. (2011). Osama bin laden death by photoshop. [Online Video]. 2 May 2011. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHwPgiPLtLk>. Accessed: 6 November 2019).

This photograph of Bin Laden became an iconic image, and therefore was used as part of conspiracy theories, as well as the mainstream media and tabloid newspapers. The mainstream media claimed that the photograph of Osama Bin Laden was real, however, when exposed as fake, the media blamed in on conspiracy theorists, when they were the ones that made the discovery in the first place. The photograph of Osama Bin Laden 'death' photo was taken in April 2009 and was used as part of conspiracy forums as proof that he was killed, however, the photograph was deemed fake because according to The Washington Post, Osama was 'visually identified' at the compound by U.S Special Operation Forces (Flock; The Washington Post; 2011). The Special Operation Forces also compared the corpse to photographs of Osama Bin Laden and were '95%' certain that the body was his. On Monday morning, U.S officials completed tests that showed a 'virtually 100% match of the body' with DNA collected from other members of the Bin Laden family. However, it wasn't used for identification as it was exposed to be fake (Flock; The Washington Post; 2011). The conspiracy theories continued as the photograph of Osama Bin Laden was published by The Middle East Online newspaper ([www.medialine.org](http://www.medialine.org)) on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2009, with a warning stating 'he couldn't tell whether it was genuine or not.' (Amelia Hill; The Guardian; 2011).

Media links were also established after it was shown on the front covers of several tabloid newspapers such as The Mail, The Times, The Telegraph, The Sun and The Mirror. It was removed after it was exposed as fake on Twitter.

According to Kenna Lindsay, a New York-based composite photographer, when consulted by media distribution site CNN quoted 'I have seen a great number of poorly photoshopped images in my time as a photographer and I can tell by the pixels that it is a fake' (Ford; CNN; 2011). White House press secretary, Jay Carney quoted 'I'll be candid that they are sensitivities here in terms of the appropriateness of releasing photographs of Osama Bin Laden in the aftermath of this firefight'. 'We are making an evaluation about the need to do that' (Ford; CNN; 2011).

In paragraph two, I will compare Barack Obama and Donald Trump's Situation room photographs and how they are both manipulated in different ways, whilst comparing the ethical approaches as well. Barack Obama was the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States from 2009 to 2017 (Wallen Feldt, Mendall; Encyclopaedia Britannica; 2019).

The Barack Obama Situation room photograph was taken in 2011 and was taken to show their reaction to the capture and killing of Osama Bin Laden, however, Donald Trump situation room photograph which was taken in 2019 and was taken after the killing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Both photographs have been manipulated in some form or another. Firstly, when looking at the Barack Obama photograph, there are some errors that can clearly be seen. Obama is 6ft 1 in height and when looking at the photograph, he is clearly smaller in comparison to the others in the room, this been said, Barack Obama and Joseph Biden are the same height, however in the photograph, Obama appears to be smaller in size. Another sign of manipulation in the photograph is his clothing attire, as president of the United States, its expected of him to be in formal wear, however, in this photograph, his clothing is casual, whilst everyone else is in work clothes (Dr. Eowyn; Fellowship of the minds; 2012), which suggests that he has been photoshopped into this photograph. However, it isn't just the president that seems to be a victim of image manipulation, it's the actual room itself because according to CNN, the photograph entitled 'The Situation Room' was in fact taken in a smaller room next to the situation room.



<https://www.readingthepictures.org/2019/10/trump-obama-situation-room-photos/>

Donald Trump is the 45<sup>th</sup> current president of the United States. The Situation room photograph was taken after the killing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. This one is slightly different in comparison to the Obama situation room

photograph. According to body language expert, Mary Civiello, she quoted 'You can see that it is clearly posed, there is probably two or three cameras taking this photograph because the eye contact with the camera is different around the table' (BBC news; 2019). Donald Trump is looking at the camera in a charged and executive way, a way that a president would often look. To Trump's right sits Pence, who looks like he is making eye contact to a different camera lens, next to him, is the national security adviser, who doesn't smile at all, but still looks proud in a way like something positive has just happened. To Trump's left, Défense Secretary, Mark Esper is sat with a disinterested look on his face, simply saying 'lets get this one over with '. When looking at the general sat next to him, he doesn't look pleased to be there because his hands are clasped tightly together with him looking in the same camera as Donald Trump is, but clearly looks forced. Finally, the brigadier general, Marcus Evans is sat making eye contact to a third camera with a toughened look on his face. When comparing to the Obama photograph, no one is posing for the camera, its just serious action happening.

When viewing both photographs, Donald Trump is seen at the top of the table surrounded by people with suits on looking at the camera. On the table are cables that connect to the laptops which from the photograph are not plugged in, this suggests that the whole situation is staged. Barack Obama is not sat at the top of the table, coffee tables are scattered around the table, the security team aren't wearing suits, and none are looking at the camera (Shamisen; Business insider; 2019), this suggests they are more focused on their jobs than Trump is. Ethical approaches are applied to this photograph as there are media links, firstly, the media criticized Donald Trump for staging the photograph, rather than what it would have been liked at the time of the raid. Former white house photographer, Peter Souza tweeted 'The raid, as reported, took placed at 3:30pm Washington time, the photo, as shown in the camera IPTC data was taken at 17:05:24'. The tweet was favoured over 50,000 times and retweeted 20,000 times in less than 24 hours. According to the New York Times, the raid on Baghdadi took place at 6:10pm, this suggests that the photograph was staged before the raid happened. Conspiracy theories for both Barack Obama and Donald Trump were also made; conspiracy theorists said the Obama situation room photograph was faked, and Osama Bin Laden had not been killed, with theorists saying that he had been killed years earlier and held by the US. Peter Souza, photographer of the 2011 situation room, caused conspiracy theories by saying that Donald Trump wasn't in the situation room when U.S forces conducted a raid against Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi.

Former American football star OJ Simpson was acquitted for the murders of his ex-wife and her friend following a high-profile 1995 criminal trial, dubbed the 'Trial of the century' (Biography.com editors; HISTORY; 2014). OJ Simpson's infamous mugshot was shown on the cover of both 'TIME' and 'Newsweek' magazine on the

27<sup>th</sup> June 1994. It shows Simpson on both covers; Newsweek showing his authenticity however, on the TIME magazine, his mugshot appears to be a darker tone. This suggests that it is an ethical approach because theories were thrown around accusing 'TIME' of manipulating his image to make



<https://www.arogundade.com/oj-simpson-murder-trial-case-time-and-newsweek-magazine-cover-controversy-1994-oj-simpson-photo-manipulation.html>

him look sinister, therefore, demonising him. You can clearly see that the image on the TIME cover is photoshopped because of the dark tones that he has centring his face, also with the background is faltering with white alongside black being used. Around his mouth area, you can clearly see that it has been digitally altered using photoshop due to the darkened tones around his cheeks leaving his mouth looking lighter. There is a contrast between the two covers with dark skin being depicted as less attractive. TIME magazine said: "When the magazine cover was being out together, the bosses at TIME gave the mugshot photograph to graphic artist Matt Mahurin to 'interpret'. (Ben Arogundade; Arogundade; 2019). "I wanted to make it more artful, more compelling", said Mahurin, unaware of the racial disruptions that he was causing. This form of image manipulation caused controversy amongst journalists, and therefore were guilty of reinforcing a false depiction of him. TIME's managing editor, James R. Gaines's quoted that he regretted doctoring the cover photo and that "no racial implication was intended, by TIME or by the artist." (Ben Arogundade; Arogundade; 2019)

Oprah Winfrey was born 29<sup>th</sup> January 1954, in Kosciusko, Mississippi, USA. She is a talk show host, known for hosting The Oprah Winfrey Show (Biography.com editors; HISTORY; 2018). Oprah Winfrey was on the cover of

TV guide in 1989, however, people were quick to point out that it wasn't Oprah, but in fact, a 1960's star, Ann – Margret. You can clearly see that Winfrey is digitally altered in some form or another, especially since photoshopped wasn't invented till two years prior to when this manipulation happened. TV guide took a picture of Winfrey's face and digitally altered it onto Ann – Margret's body. Before it was published, it was known that neither women had been asked permission before usage of photography (Garber; The Atlantic; 2012). The shot of Oprah Winfrey was from another publicity image taken in 1979. The cover was



<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/06/oprah-head-ann-margarets-body-a-brief-history-of-pre-photoshop-fakery/258369/>

immediately spotted by Ann – Margret’s fashion designer, who recognized the dress (MA ‘At: photo tampering throughout history; 2010).

WORD COUNT: 2,122

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