



Questioned Documents Section – 2010

J14 An Examination of Sources and Content to Root Out Faked Photos and Methods of Presenting Pictures to Maximize Their Impact

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After attending this session, attendees will understand some principals of image fakery and detection and will learn how pictures are selected to illustrate news articles.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by identifying means of analyzing photos and will offer examples of how and why manipulation can occur, sometimes without malice of intent and other times to purposefully direct perception and opinion. By evaluating how pictures are analyzed and presented in the newspaper, the forensic document examiner will gain useful information that can be applied to his/her own examination and presentation of photographs.

The presentation will cover methods of determining the authenticity of a photograph, which include critically considering the sources of the photos, and by comparing a photo in question with other relevant news photos. It will also describe how picture editors might present a particular set of images to be most persuasive. Some pertinent examples of images which were discovered to be outright fakes include: a doctored image of an Iranian missile launch, which was identified upon submission to *The Times* to be bogus, but was erroneously published in other publications as an accurate depiction of events; and a doctored image of heavy smoke over Lebanon, which was discovered to be a fake only after publication. Other forms of manipulated imagery are staged situations in Myanmar, for example, that allow outsiders access to clean refugee areas in the aftermath of the typhoon, while denying access to devastation. There are also so-called "set designers," or people who stage photos to maximize impact in the press. These are prevalent in war zones when one side stands to benefit from depicting themselves as being either victimized, or to be a stronger power. In these kinds of cases, it is often not the scene in the photo that is the biggest problem, but that meanings can be changed depending on the caption. Anyone who provides pictures for publication and has an interest in promoting or creating a public image could manipulate an image. Because it is in the newspapers interest to portray events as accurately as possible, uncontrolled photographs of all kinds are regarded carefully. Government handouts or even handouts from a performance fall into this category. Whether a photo is a hard news photo or a soft feature photo, the goal is the same - how to best convey a story and how to persuade the finder of fact that the story they have of the event is the correct one.

The presentation will stress the scrutiny of photographs on many levels – for content, caption, and for what they might not be showing. Knowing the source and what might motivate that source is also critical. The final vetting process at *The Times* involves selecting the few which tell the story best. How they are presented can make the difference between getting the point across or not.

Photographs, Manipulated, Faked