Visual Culture

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Media Literacy Paper: Photo

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1. **All media are constructions**

Who is the original author of this image/film? What are her/his motivations? Did the photographer or filmmaker stage or set up the picture? Or was it documented (captured) by chance or anticipation by the photographer or filmmaker?

The author of this image is Alan Diaz, a photographer for the Associated Press’ Miami bureau. Diaz was born and raised in New York, but moved down to Cuba to be with his parents. While Diaz went to school in Cuba, he began teaching. Upon the realization that his passion was photography, he returned to the United States to begin his career as a photographer. Diaz was a freelance photographer when he started working for the AP in 1994, and in 2000 he became a staff photographer (<http://www.pulitzer.org/biography/2001-Breaking-News-Photography>). He captured this photo of a young Cuban refugee named Elian Gonzalez and Donato Dalrymple along with two federal agents from the United States Border Patrol BORTAC (Border Patrol Tactical Unit) in a relative's home in Cuba (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Diaz>). Diaz himself took this picture. When asked about the photo, Diaz said "I was just doing my job. I did what I always do - I shoot pictures” (<http://www.pulitzer.org/biography/2001-Breaking-News-Photography>).

The reality is that Alan Diaz spent months getting to know the Gonzalez family, covering the story from as close as their backyard. Once he familiarized himself with the family and his surroundings, Diaz was able to get a closer look and experience the events that were taking place. He was the only photographer there and witness the event in action. This event was anticipated by Diaz not in time, but in expectancy of occurrence. Although Diaz knew things were brewing, he made a quick decision on that day, to take a photograph that evidently would change his life forever (<http://photography.about.com/od/famousphotographersbios/a/famousphotographeralandiazbiography.htm>).

**II. The media construct a reality**

What is the “reality” being constructed? A) The apparent reality? B) The implied reality? What are the possible interpretations to be drawn from A) and B)?

The apparent reality is the scared little boy being held. We see the guns held by two men in armor pointing at him and there is obvious fear and confusion in his face. The implied reality is the legal status and custody battle that Elian Gonzalez is embroiled in. This also includes the lack of immigration policy and reform.

There are a variety of possible interpretations that could be drawn from both the apparent and implied realities of the content. Some might interpret this content as a tactic to move immigration legislation within the U.S. and Cuban governments. Others might say this content was alarming, especially because there was a child involved. In the end, people's perceptions change the way they view content with or without bias, and there is clear emotion sewn into this photograph.

**III. Audiences negotiate meaning in media**

What meaning does this content have for you as an individual based on your: A) Demographics? B) Knowledge? C) Opinions? D) Values? (CHOOSE ONE TO ANSWER)

I see much fear in the young boy's face. Personally, I believe it is very scary for children to have no say in their legal status, even in extremely unique cases, like Elian’s. In today's world, we constantly hear stories about people who immigrate to the United States and other places, seeking some form of asylum and witness the struggles and obstacles they encounter and overcome daily. The content surprised me, because I couldn’t wrap my head around the gun pointing at Elian and the man holding him. My thoughts started to race as I began to think about all this little boy had gone through; from losing his mother and family, to being the center of a brutal custody battle-- he had gone through enough at such a young age.

**IV. Media have commercial implications**

How might the commercial (advertising, revenue) requirements affect or influence the nature of this media content? Who owns the organization producing this content? Who profits from this media?

There were no previous commercial advertising requirements with this content. Mr. Diaz photographed this content and the Associated Press produced it. It is owned and copyrighted by the Associated Press. Despite its display on the Pulitzer Prize website, the Associated Press still owns it. Mr. Diaz profited from this content after winning the Pulitzer Prize and 7,500 dollars (<http://photography.about.com/od/famousphotographersbios/a/famousphotographeralandiazbiography.htm>).

**V. Media contain ideological and value messages**

What core values are conveyed by this selection of media content?

The core values that are conveyed by this selection of media content are that there were at the time, and still today, many issues regarding the lack of formal immigration policy and special interest exceptions for children. We see these problems today in the news. There is little-to-no reform that protects children and even families that are forced to leave their native country or are seeking some sort of asylum.

Due to the fact that this case was followed closely, seen by many, and prevalent within numerous media outlets, the content could be easily misconstrued and taken out of context. It is important that those responsible for the avenues of advertisement monitor the content with caution, so that accuracy and truth remain preserved.

**VI. Media have social and political implications**

What impact may this content have in shaping a local or national discussion? What are the implications to politicians or similar policy makers?

The political implications dealt with the “back and forth” nature of the decisions being made. While former Vice President Al Gore said he supported legislation to allow Elian to remain in the U.S., Attorney General Reno and others were pushing for the child and his father to be reunited in Cuba (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/elian/etc/eliancron.html>). The implicit message lies within the length of time and bureaucratic process this case entailed.

**VII. The formation of content is influenced by its intended publishing platform**

How is this image and film influenced by the platform (medium) it is published on? What can’t this image or film reveal in certain mediums (such as radio)?

This image makes up for the emotion we can’t hear (i.e. the yelling and fear within the room when the raid occurred). This image portrays the current state of emotion(s) and gives us a good sense of what was leading up to the event. The image cannot, however, provide any audio or video platform since it is a still shot.

**VIII. Production values and aesthetics matter**

1) Does another party influence the filmmaker’s or photographer’s recording of the event? Or is this a “found” situation by the photographer or filmmaker – making it a more authentic record? 2) What does the creator’s own production quality suggest about the authenticity of the film or the picture? Low-budget or highly edited? Hi-res or low-res? Manipulated or enhanced?

This content is not staged, but rather it depicts raw emotion and actual events. Mr. Diaz adjusted his shutter speed and lighting and then ran inside the house to take the shot. We can infer that he does not need to zoom in since he is in such close proximity of the event taking place.