

2021-2022 Middle School Ethics Bowl Case Set

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Case #6: Photoshop Fiction

In the early 2000's, the public learned that many celebrity photographs appearing in print magazines and advertisements were digitally touched up and airbrushed. Since then, photoshopping in advertising has caused strong public backlash. Due to this, some companies have made an effort to highlight the authenticity of their models. In 2004, Dove Soap initiated the "The Self Esteem Project" to address the negative body image issues many young people experience.

As of 2011, photoshopping was denounced by the American Medical Association because it contributes to low self-esteem and body-image disorders. That same year, the U.K.'s National Advertising Division banned retouched Maybelline and Lancôme advertisements, saying the advertisements misled consumers about the cosmetic products' benefits.

However, not all consumers and companies think that photoshopping is problematic, claiming that consumers need to be responsible to separate reality from photoshop fiction. "We all know when images are touched up or altered, no disclaimer needed," wrote Amanda Fortini in a 2010 *New York Magazine* article. "The problem isn't altered photographs; it's our failure to alter our expectations of them." Another editor of a popular fashion magazine responded to a question about photoshop use in her industry this way: "We all like to look at beautiful people and things." Additionally, some critics of government regulation on photoshopping argue that any law would intrude on a business's right to advertise its product, or on its right to free expression.

Match Question: Is it ethical to photoshop an image? Why or why not?

Study Questions:

1. What are the different ways that photoshop can be used?
2. Is photoshop a form of deception or creative expression (or something else)?
3. Should photoshopping be regulated? If so, what should this look like?

Case adapted from the National High School Ethics Bowl 2014-2015 case set