

# CHAPTER NINE

## Making and taking images

### Key issues

- Photographs are not just taken, they are “made”.
- The process of “making” photographs is an extremely important one where gender is concerned. What the photographer looks for, sees, frames, and shoots are all influenced by the photographers own deeply held beliefs. They are critical in shaping messages about gender.
- The many other decision makers in the process of making and taking photographs are also an important factor, as are the environment and its “norms”.
- These can all be challenged and changed through awareness, training and commitment to transformation.



This photograph, taken by Rui Assubuji during the training workshop is a good example of seizing the moment. This is not a posed photo. Assubuji spotted a man reading a story on gender violence and took the photo.

## Introduction

Photography's great myth is that it records and reproduces "truth". "A picture is worth a thousand words" because we believe it must be an absolute and accurate reflection of something that happened.

This comes through in the title of a photojournalism manual called *The Photojournalist's Bible*, published in 1994. The book is called *Truth needs no ally*. This ingrained belief, that photographs don't lie, is the first major source of gender bias in the visual media.

Photojournalism's second, related myth, holds that photographers "take" pictures as they come across them in the passing world. That means that the photographer (and also intervening editors, layout artists, and even printers) exercise little or no significant control over constructing the meaning that the image conveys.

Of the many different aspects and subtleties of experience around us, the photographer, the reporter, the editor, and even the audience choose which subjects get photographed, how these subjects are imaged, produced, and reproduced, and which aspects get lost along the way.

The photojournalist, in making pictures, creates meaning, through concrete and practical acts. Photojournalists are also inevitably – affected by the world around them, such as the globalisation of images and commercialisation of sex discussed in earlier chapters.

We live surrounded by societies rooted in gendered divisions of wealth, power and labour. We are brought up acting within and acting out gender roles and behaviour. We accept and believe gendered perceptions, which nourish the roots of our knowledge and even our science. Even our hopes and wishes and intentions are cast in gender terms.

When we do not acknowledge this gendered nature of society then gender bias and inequality, will continue unquestioned. This means we must recognise and explore gender in all of our functions.

The photojournalist must recognise what is there in terms of gender, and also what is not being shown. Obviously not every picture can or should show everything. But the overall import should be to convey complex realities.

### Exercise: Changing technologies

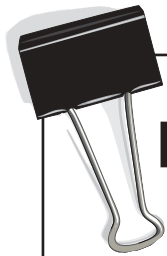
With reference to **Handout thirty-three**, discuss how changing technology is affecting the making and taking of photographs.

## The Briefing

The first step in the chain consists of the editor briefing the photojournalist. The photojournalist needs concrete information: where to go, when, and what kind of picture is needed. Without this information, the photographer may not know what kind of equipment will be needed, what kind of subject she or he should aim to get, or even when or where the event takes place. Where possible, the photographer can be briefed with the journalist covering the event, so they have a similar idea of what is needed.

Editors need to grasp the basics of what goes into briefing a photojournalist. The photojournalist also needs to know what to ask for in the briefing and should be encouraged to ask those questions.

This is particularly important for empowering women photojournalists. When the briefing is insufficient, the photojournalist cannot complete the job well. Then she gets the blame.



## handout thirty-three

### New tools, new challenges

By Judy Seidman

The increasing use of digital image technology – from digital cameras to photoshop programs – changes the way people create and develop photographs, often quite dramatically.

Changing technology and industrial structure have a major impact on how the image is constructed, from the “captured” event to the printed page. This in turn has altered how the people who are involved in this chain – from the commissioning editor to the photographer on the scene to the layout artist – see and approach their work.

Digital cameras are small and easy to carry or even hide. A physically strong, male crew is no longer required to have the camera ready with lens and flash at the right place during a violent confrontation. Snapping pictures with a digital camera is quick, and it can be nearly continuous. You do not have to run out to change film.

A photographer with the right equipment can download the pictures into a computer, then send it in to the main office by cell-phone, making “instant” access to pictures possible. This does assume that the photographer is in a location with cell-phone access, which more remote areas still do not have.

Cost structures change with digital technology. Gone (or at least, going) are the days when your editor would tell you: “you can take only five shots on this subject, don’t waste film.” Digital cameras can take hundreds of pictures. Down-loading them to the computer, and weeding out the unused ones, costs only time and energy.

Digital cameras also cut back on the need for skills and expertise around the “making” of photographs.

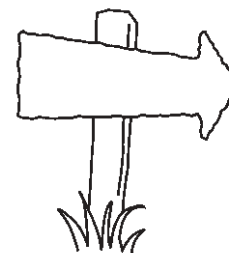
Practically any snapshot producing a digital image – including a still taken from video footage – can be manoeuvred afterwards on the computer, to deal with troublesome artistic or conceptual questions around emphasis, design, placement, and enlargement.

One result of this is the wider the range of choice available. But those choices are more likely to be made by the layout artist or sub-editor, rather than the photographer in the field.

This links to faking and manipulating pictures, as well as packaging and positioning. Changing digital technologies have dramatically increased the possibilities for “correcting” or altering the camera image. Further, the temptation to make a generalised picture “work” by tying it in to a specific event through a caption or a heading may be hard to resist. These decisions are made at the desk, with no reference to the cameraperson in the field.

The decision-making processes about photographic images for print now range from the editor’s briefing the person who goes and gets the image, to the end-of-the-line sub-editor’s decisions about structuring the page. The briefing editor is more likely to explain the specific content of the image that they want – knowing what is readily available. The person behind the camera is restricted to interpreting this briefing. Then the sub-editor makes further adjustments in what to use and how to use it. In effect, the photographer no longer holds an exclusive expertise, experience, and awareness of the image content that determine the image that gets into print.

Signposts: Taking the heat, by Gally Kambeu p85



### Exercise: Role play the briefing

Ask participants to act out each of the following:

*One:* One person acts as the male editor. He calls in a young woman photographer and tells her to get some pictures about an event in a village 60 km away, where someone from the Ministry of Water Affairs is supposed to open a new well that afternoon.

The photographer leaves the editor's desk. She talks to other journalists in the office (mostly men) about what she should do – for instance, where to go, how to go there, what to bring as equipment, when she has to be there, what would make this photograph interesting and help explain the story. They respond, giving the kinds of answers she would probably receive under real life conditions. She then has to decide how to go about doing the assignment.

*Two:* The same scene, but this time the editor briefs the photographer more fully. He tells her when the event will occur, who in the ministry is going to the event, the importance of the story (and therefore of the photographs). For instance, women in the district have demanded a clear and accessible water supply for years. She then goes into the office, and talks to the other journalists (again, mostly men) about how she should go about the assignment.



**Training tip:** In the first scene the photographer is unlikely to be able to get the picture that the editor wants. She may complain about the distance and transport needed to get to a subject that does not sound important. She does not know when to be there, and she may miss the shot. The journalists she asks for help may be quite dismissive of the problems she faces (even suggesting she is incompetent, rather than just badly briefed). If she does go, she is likely to end up with a picture of the Minister (a man) making a speech. In the second scene, these problems should not develop.

In discussing and comparing the role plays, note that if the woman photographer fails to go on the shoot, or fails to get a good picture, she may well find that the editor and other members of the news team say it is all her fault because she is not competent; often, because she is a woman. For instance, they may say that she did not want to go so far out of town, because it might be exhausting and is not very safe.

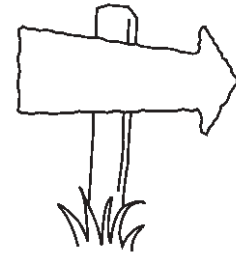
### Getting the picture

Being effectively briefed is only the first step in getting the right picture. A photographer needs the right equipment and skills for the particular task. Knowing what may be needed and what has to be done is mostly a matter of experience.

In practically any work situation, a newly employed (and thus less experienced) person needs to be “shown the ropes”. However, where a woman is employed in a job that has been traditionally defined as “a man’s job”, she may find male colleagues are less willing to recognise and address the problems she faces as a new employee. The solution to this is a formal “mentoring” program – assigning formal responsibility to an experienced staff member to assist new employees.

### To photograph or not to photograph

Another point where the photographer's expertise has to develop over time comes around “setting up” the picture. Often the press identifies and targets “victims” because of their sex – in stories around rape and women abuse, HIV and AIDS, and homosexuality, and all kinds of “sexual scandals”, to name the most common. Not surprisingly, people in these situations may be very dubious about being identified, and labelled by the press. Gender issues very often come with a “do not photograph” tag attached.



It takes some experience to work out how to deal with these issues. Often the photojournalist – like any investigative journalist on a hot story – needs to find an “in”, a person who is willing to introduce the photographer to the situation, to ensure that there is trust, and that there is confidence that the photographer justifies that trust. These situations may also lead to concrete decisions around ethics: should your photograph show the world an event, when the person or people involved do not want it to be public knowledge?

There is also a flip side to “setting up” picture shoots. Sometimes, the subject wants to promote an image other than what you as the photographer think the picture ought to be. A common complaint of photojournalists is that they are expected to film a politician or other Important Person: then the Important Person (or their publicity team) tells them to take the shot the way the politician wants it. This may be as simple as showing the Important Person in good light in front of the national flag. But as politicians become more aware of how to create their own images, they demand more say in how they are photographed.

### Choosing subjects to be photographed

Every two-dimensional image that attempts to capture an act or event must be in some way taken out of time, out of the flux of change and scene. Often, the photographer deliberately takes a ream of “snap-shots”, one image after the other, hoping that one of them will “work”.

Photographer’s choice also tends to involve avoiding “ill defined” areas. Often, this means ignoring those scenes and symbols which do not fit the photographer’s preconceptions, or what the photographer thinks of as the audience’s preconceptions.

### Framing and timing

The issue is not just what to photograph, but what to include in the photograph. Often pictures of women – when they are portrayed in non – stereotypical roles – show them as passive and docile. Timing also plays an important role in getting images. This may be purely coincidental or a result of deliberate effort and patience. Either way, the photographer has to react instantly when they “see” a photo pass them by.

### Exercise: Framing and timing

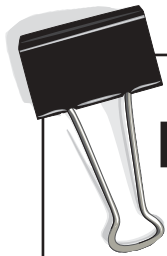
With reference to **Handout thirty-four**, what do these images reflect about framing and timing?



**Training tip:** The first image is of a youth AIDS activist group in South Africa. Notice their animated conversation in front of a gripping poster targeting the South African ministers of health, trade and industry for failing to provide anti-retroviral drugs. The second image is a poignant illustration of timing: the white man in a suit walking past the woman begging without even noticing her on the streets of Harare.

### Gender blindness

Other than the blatant gender stereotypes that pervade the media, by far the biggest failing of photojournalists is simply failing to “see” women in all their diversity, or as the Gender and Media Baseline Study calls it “gender-blindness”. To take just one example of how pervasive and unconscious this blindness can be: the introduction to a photojournalism manual for APS (published in the USA) lists two pages of examples of potential images that are newsworthy, interesting, or particularly “human”, and thus should count as photo-journalist subjects. Not one of the proposed subjects even mentions a woman, far less what she is doing.



## handout thirty-four

Framing and timing of pictures



By Trevor Davies



By Trevor Davies