The famous saying “a picture is worth a thousand words” is incredibly true when it comes to journalism. Journalist can use pictures to summarise stories into a single image by carefully manipulating several key elements of photography. Within this essay I will discuss key elements in reference to “a Life in Death” by Nancy Borowick, to demonstrate how these many techniques can be used to effectively to communicate a story with discussion of potential ethical issues that could arise within the photo.

“A Life in Death” focuses on a couple, man and woman, who appear in a hospital chairs. Upon closer inspection, the chemotherapy chairs and IV apparatus become apparent, leading the viewer to believe that these patients are fighting cancer. The two seem content by being with each other as they are receiving their treatment despite being unwell. Neither appear upset by their condition, where in fact, they appear quite relaxed by reading a magazine and participating in conversation. Additionally the composition, lighting and colour choices add to the emotion and tone for this photograph, which detail the story that the photo is attempting to describe.

There are several photography techniques that assist with the content of an image to better communicate the underlying message. Composition is the art of effectively ordering or arranging the objects within a photograph. In this example, several composition choices were made to emphasise that the two subjects are the main focus of the story. For instance, a border around the subjects is established with the benches, shelves and medical equipment to focus in on their presence. Furthermore, the front on angle draws attention to the situation. Additionally, symmetry and a relatively plain background was also used. Award-winning photographer Roberto Valenzuela states that symmetry is a rarely used but effective tool for creating harmony in a photo (Valenzuela 2012). Indeed, this is demonstrated here to make the subjects seem at peace and the focus. Together this begins to shape the story conveyed by the photo.

The lighting style in this particular photo utilised natural lighting from the window of the hospital room. This lighting causes one side of the subjects to be completely illuminated where the other side is darkened. This increases a dramatic element to the picture by bringing out more texture in the subject’s faces. Despite the darkness and shadows thrown by the low natural lighting, this photo isn’t too dark to evoke a deeply sad sombre mood. Instead the lightness contrasting the dark elicits a sentimental or bittersweet melancholy, teamed up with the black and white photographic choice.

A photographer’s choice of colouring is a major tool for manipulating the mood of a photograph. In “a Life in Death”, the black and white colouring choice adds a greater emotional response than it presumably would with the natural colour. Black and white colouring is a common choice for manipulating the mood of a photograph, where this has been found to shift the viewer from positive to negative moods (Lee *et al*., 2014). In this particular example, limiting colours to black and white creates an almost sombre mood which adds the underlying message. This photograph shows that the subjects are not necessarily scared of death as they have one another, yet it still reflects and conveys the negative side of the illness while they face a horribly painful treatment through use of colour.

Ultimately, through the use of composition, colour and lighting techniques, this photo tells the story of a married couple undergoing chemotherapy, not seemingly scared by the medical treatment they are receiving or the possibility of death. For multiple reasons this image conveys a story similar to what would be shown in a human interest news piece. Firstly, the focus on the couple by using front-on angles, use of bordering and symmetry personify the subjects in the image, making the story about them and not a story on chemotherapy or cancer. Additionally, the use of colour and lighting evoke a deep emotional response to an illness that can affect anybody. Despite the nature of chemotherapy, the photo is fairly light which also inspires hope, peace or bittersweet emotions which may make the story one of triumph or perseverance. This story makes it evident that the couple are both inflicted with the deadly illness. For this reason, readers may be interested and attracted to the underlying story of a couple staying together, battling cancer until the end. This is effectively promoted in “a Life and Death”.

While a photographer’s main focus may be on the technicalities and topic they are trying to represent, they must not forget the ethical implications that may stem from their work. Ethics is very important when approaching a sensitive topic like this, where the subjects in the photo are being represented as themselves. The photographer must approach as a detached professional, not to skew the underlying context of the photo or falsely represent the subjects as per the Code of Ethics (NPPA, 2016). Here, the subjects did not want to be depicted as weak or dying so it was up to the photographer to honour this, and not over-exaggerate the story for their own benefit. For example, the underlying message could have been skewed by manipulating the brightness to a darker shade where this may convey a different story of defeat to cancer. Yet, it was taken in a way that seemed very tasteful and in accordance with the subjects’ wishes and consent. It’s the duty of the photographer to preserve the context and wellbeing of the subjects in this photo to ultimately tell the story. Therefore, “a Life in Death” accurately depicts the topic matter and effectively conveys a heartfelt story true to the real situation.

The use of photography in journalism effectively summarizes the story that is trying to be conveyed through use of the photography techniques as demonstrated here. "A Life in Death" by Nancy Borowick utilizes composition techniques, such as use of bordering, symmetry and angle choice, as well as black and white colour and natural lighting to focus the topic on the subjects of the photo while manipulating emotion. Together this effectively and truthfully represents a couple of chemotherapy patients battling cancer together which summarises a heartfelt human interest story.

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