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Who Can Improve on Nature? Magazine Editors.

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Abstract: The magazine editors knew they had their cover shot. The model, just emerged from a small pond, produced a look for the camera that exuded intelligence and confidence. The only problem was the water droplets clinging to the model's ears. So the **photo** editors had the ears retouched and the December 2011-January 2012 issue of Garden and Gun went to press. Its flawless cover model: an English Labrador named Deke. [ABSTRACT FROM PUBLISHER]

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Who Can Improve on Nature? Magazine Editors

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The magazine editors knew they had their cover shot. The model, just emerged from a small pond, produced a look for the camera that exuded intelligence and confidence. The only problem was the water droplets clinging to the model's ears. So the **photo** editors had the ears retouched and the December 2011-January 2012 issue of Garden and Gun went to press.

Its flawless cover model: an English Labrador named Deke.

As long as magazines have retouched **photos** -- as long as there have been magazines, basically -- there has been a debate about the line between improving an image and outright manipulation, especially in women's magazines where models are made to look younger and thinner and any blemishes are removed. The debate was revived earlier this month with Seventeen magazine's announcement that it would "never change girls' body or face shapes" in the magazine.

But the practice of **retouching**, once largely confined to **fashion** spreads and advertisements, has become much more common in recent years across all editorial photography, according to many industry professionals. Skies are made brighter, animals become flawless, grass is made to look greener and, in a recent issue of Women's Health, sheep were made to look whiter.

The increased manipulation of images has conditioned readers, already accustomed to digital effects in movies and on television, to expect not an accurate **photo**, but an image that's a heightened version of the truth.

"There is an impulse I've seen over the last several years to improve on reality," said David Granger, the editor in chief of Esquire, who has had to request stripped-down versions of editorial photographs so that he can understand what the original image looks like. "People think, 'I should manipulate this to create a more beautiful **photo**.' "

The chief reason **retouching** has become so prevalent is technological: with digital cameras and computers, anyone can alter a photograph and that shift has driven a change in the business. After Bob Scott, a freelance commercial photographer, shot a professional golfer for a Golf magazine in early 2010, he noticed that the magazine had removed some white specks on the AstroTurf from beneath the golfer's feet to make the ground look like a flawless green carpet.

Mr. Scott said younger people coming into the profession simply consider it part of the job.

"When you're graduating out of a university and studying design, you're coming out with these skills where you're using Photoshop as a tool," Mr. Scott said. "They're creating these plausible realities."

Retouching has become so prevalent on editorial pages that magazine industry executives have considered introducing guidelines on what is considered acceptable. Sid Holt, chief executive of the American Society of Magazine Editors, said that in the past the industry only established guidelines regarding advertising and editorial conflicts. After much discussion, the society concluded that editors can continue to regulate themselves for now.

"It's really the responsibility of the individual brands," Mr. Holt said.

Magazine editors often have widely different interpretations of these standards. Maggie Kennedy, the photography director of Garden & Gun magazine, said that the magazine had removed the water from the cover dog's ears so that the copy on the cover stood out.

"We're not altering the animal's body," Ms. Kennedy said. "Ours is about accommodating design and copy."

Margaret Russell, editor in chief of Architectural Digest, said that for covers she is comfortable making skies outside windows bluer and flowers on a table more intense. On the June cover, she had a vase of flowers shifted off-center on a table and she sometimes edits out lighting fixtures on ceilings because it is difficult to read titles over them. But she does not change the color of furniture or remove the Andy Warhol paintings from walls.

"We're not pretending there is a view of the Alps when you are on Central Park West," Ms. Russell said. "We're not out to cheat anyone. It's not like I'm taking wrinkles away from somebody's face."

Though many magazines do. Larry Hackett, editor in chief of People, said he follows the "wedding picture test," allowing **photo** editors to remove crow's feet and hairs that fall out of place. That kind of **retouching** "doesn't alter the reality," he added. "But it makes it sweeter."

Kate White, editor in chief of Cosmopolitan, said that on celebrity covers, "certainly I've changed colors of a top."

"I've changed colors of a dress," she added. "I've changed a background."

But she does not alter the bodies of cover models and points out that her work is probably easier because Cosmopolitan generally features models and actresses young enough to have any flaws removed with makeup.

Jill Greenberg, the art and commercial photographer who captured images of sheep for a 2011 Women's Health article on sleep, said that her subjects looked like, well, sheep -- their coats "a pretty dark grayish-yellow dingy color." Her editors asked to her make them appear whiter.

"We had to make the sheep look like a cartoon sheep that is white," Ms. Greenberg said. "We sort of have ideas in our mind and it's all sort of a fantasy."

The demands of celebrities also drive this broader trend toward perfection. Mr. Granger said that he found more photographers are

being pressured to produce shots that the actors or actresses like because celebrities then will request the photographer in the future for other magazine covers or for advertising work. That can be critical because editorial work alone is not enough to sustain a career in photography.

Ms. Greenberg said that in 2002 she shot Tom Cruise when he was wearing braces. She used Photoshop to remove the braces before submitting the photographs but the magazine asked her to put the braces back in.

"I was sad because I was like 'now Tom Cruise is going to hate me,' " she said. Ms. Greenberg has not shot Mr. Cruise since then.

Celebrities can be pretty aggressive about what how they want to be presented. Mr. Scott, who shoots on the set of "Celebrity Apprentice," said that the reality television star Aubrey O'Day would check the images he was taking on set and periodically ask him to remove shots that were not flattering. He typically agreed.

Pushing back can have a price. Chris Buck, a celebrity photographer who describes his shots as more natural, tells his assistant during **photo** shoots not to let a publicist or celebrity look at his work. He said his approach has cost him some business, especially with older actresses.

"I don't photograph a lot of women because I'm quote unquote not good with women," he said. "What that means is that they want a picture that's interesting, but that flatters first."

Emma Stydahr, a 17-year-old high school senior, said that flattering the subjects can harm readers. A former avid reader of Teen Vogue, Ms. Stydahr recently helped start a petition against the magazine's refusal to change its **retouching** practices.

"I'm not an expert on Photoshop," she said. "But I'm an expert on being a teen girl. I don't think girls have to grow up where their self-esteem is compromised."

PHOTOS: The picture of a sheep that was whitened for a Women's Health magazine article on sleep. (PHOTOGRAPH BY JILL GREENBERG)(C1); Teenage girls with Spark a Movement stage a mock **fashion** show this month to protest the use of retouched **photos** of girls in Teen Vogue. (PHOTOGRAPH BY SHANNON STAPLETON/REUTERS); The cover of the December 2011- January 2012 issue of Garden & Gun. The dog's ears were retouched. (PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDY ANDERSON)(C5)

Late Edition - Final

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By CHRISTINE HAUGHNEY

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