

Applied Heuristic for Visual Analysis of Advocacy Images

Mom2Mom Breastfeeding Group Image:



Heuristic for Visual Analysis of Advocacy Images

Analysis of the Artifact (Photograph)

The research project relies on visual analysis, cultural analysis, and rhetorical analysis to analyze the images. The chart below uses social semiotics, as described in Jewitt and Rumiko’s “Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Approach” to analyze how visuals create meaning in the interaction between the image and the viewer through contact, distance, and point of view. It looks at how images convey compositional meaning through information value (placement of elements in a composition), framing, salience, and modality. The next chart examines how meaning is made from the images through analysis of both the production context and the contexts of distribution and reception. The final chart relies in the previous to analysis to analyze the way that these elements reveal and conceal information about the subjects, the way that the images perceive the social contexts of breastfeeding mothers, and finally to examine what is revealed and concealed about societal attitudes toward breastfeeding from the reception of the images.

| Variables | Questions |
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| Subject | <p>Who/what is the subject? What is the landscape like? Who are the people?</p> <p>Two mothers in Air Force National Guard uniforms breastfeeding their children. Both mothers are members of the Mom2Mom breastfeeding support group at Fairchild Air Force Base.</p> <p>They are sitting outside breastfeeding their children. One of the mothers is breastfeeding twins.</p> |
| Composition | <p>How is the image laid out? How is space used? How are subjects placed in the image? What lines or patterns exists in the image?</p> <p>The two mothers sit next to one another so that the center of the image is the open space between them. The camera is close so that only their torsos upward are visible. The bodies of the mothers form somewhat triangular shapes pointing upward, while the space between them forms a downward triangle. There is not much headspace above the women. There is only a bit of space to the side of one nursing woman, and the image cuts off right outside of the body of the other nursing mother. The mother of twins holds one supported by each arm, further suggesting the shape of a triangle. The rounded heads of her children and of her breasts provide a significant contrast to the triangular shape of her body. The mother of the nursing female infant holds her child across her lap. The body of the child is supported by both arms of the mother. The dark head of the child and the contrast of the white bow draw the eye.</p> |
| Camera Position/Angle | <p>How is the camera positioned in relationship to the subjects? Eyelevel? Above? Below? Far away? Close/intimate? Medium distance?</p> |

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| | <p>The camera seems to be positioned at eye level. The distance is somewhat medium-close. As there are two subjects, so that while there are two subjects, the image seems intimate.</p> |
| Tonality/Color | <p>Is the image bright? Dark? Light? What colors are used? Are there cultural meanings to the color?</p> <p>The color is light. The tones are somewhat muted. As the women are outside in the brightness of daylight, the image is light. The grass and the women's uniforms of various shades of olive green provide a low level of color contrast. The dark hair of the brunette mother and the dark head of her nursing daughter in contrast with the white bow and the red outfit are the largest areas of color contrast.</p> |
| Look/Gesture | <p>Where are the subjects looking? What is implied by the look? Does the subject acknowledge the camera? What gestures are being made?</p> <p>The mother of twins is looking at the camera and smiling, suggesting that she is aware that the picture is being taken and suggesting that she is posing. The mother of the single nursing child is looking down into the face of the child. She seems less posed, and if it were not for the other woman in the image posing, it could perhaps look like she was not aware of the camera.</p> |
| Size Relationships | <p>Does the subject fill the frame? Does the subject appear larger (closer) than other subjects, or smaller?</p> <p>The subjects do fill the frame. The subjects of the image are clearly meant to be the focus of the image.</p> |
| Informational Value | <p>How does placement of elements convey information about them?</p> <p>The women are nursing outdoors, suggesting that they are comfortable nursing in public. They are clearly the subject of the image.</p> |
| Framing | <p>Do the elements of the image seem to belong together?</p> <p>Yes they do. There is a sense of harmony in the image.</p> |
| Saliency | <p>Are some elements of the image more eye-catching than others?</p> |

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| | <p>Due to color contrast, the heads of the brunette mother and child pop out of the image, as does the brunette child's red and white outfit.</p> <p>The rounded shape of both the blonde mother's breasts and heads of her children draw the eye because of the contrast of shape, and perhaps also because of the exposure of the cleavage while the rest of her body is covered in a military uniform.</p> |
| Modality | <p>Does the image seem representative of reality?</p> <p>Yes because the mothers are really nursing their children and seem to be comfortable in their environment. However, because the one mother is smiling at the camera, it is clear that the mothers are posing.</p> |
| Representational Meaning | <p>Does the image have a narrative structure or a conceptual structure?</p> <p>A narrative structure represents an event, action, or process. How? Who is acting? Who is reacting? How? Are the action and the reaction transactive?</p> <p>A conceptual structure defines, analyzes, or classifies subjects. Does the image classify the subject? Does it define or identify the subject? Does it analyze the subject by showing it to be part of a whole or separate?</p> <p>There is a bit of a narrative to the image, showing these mother in uniform presents a bit about a moment in time; however, it seems that the images are meant to present a concept that these women are mothers and warriors. That they have dual identities, and because they look comfortable, they seem to be navigating these identities well.</p> |

Analysis of the Cultural Context

| Variables | Questions |
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| Owner/Client | <p>If the image was not directly produced, who commissioned the image? What are the affiliations of the client?</p> <p>The image was commissioned as part of a photoshoot that included all of the mothers involved in the Mom2Mom group.</p> |

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| <p>Creator/Designer</p> | <p>Who created the image? What was the design relationship? Was there collaboration between the client and the designer?</p> <p>The photographer was Brynja Sigurdardottir, and the images are hosted on her website.</p> |
| <p>Exigence</p> | <p>What is the problem that the image is attempting to solve?</p> <p>The image is attempting to promote the group in the local military community at Fairchild Air Force base. The choice to have these mothers pose in uniform seems to suggest that women in uniform may need a particular kind of support and that they may also be more convinced to attend a group meeting if there are women like them in the group.</p> |
| <p>Purpose</p> | <p>What purpose was the image meant to serve? What message was the image intending to send?</p> <p>The purpose was to promote the group as well as send a message that mothers in military are capable of successfully breastfeeding their children.</p> |
| <p>Terministic Screens</p> | <p>How does the image rely on cultural norms to convey the message?</p> <p>The military uniform seems to suggest strength and a warrior ethos. At the same time, the image has a soft, maternal element. The image attempts to convey a message that military mothers occupy dual roles and that they do it with strength and confidence.</p> |
| <p>Ethos</p> | <p>How does the artifact present the ethos of the subjects and appeal to the need for the audience to trust the source?</p> <p>The image presents a mother-warrior ethos. They seem to suggest confidence and agency.</p> |
| <p>Text</p> | <p>How is text used in the visual? How does text direct meaning?</p> <p>The image contains no text.</p> |
| <p>Audience</p> | <p>Who is the target audience? Is there an incidental audience?</p> <p>The target audience was mothers in the community to encourage them to breastfeed and to get support.</p> |
| <p>Distribution</p> | <p>How was the image distributed by the client/designer? How was distribution location chosen?</p> <p>The image was distributed on the photographer's website and was going to be placed on posters and other materials created as promotional materials.</p> |
| <p>Reception</p> | <p>How was the image received by the target audience? How was the image received by a larger audience?</p> |

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| | The reception for the target audience seemed positive; however, there is little information about the local reception. The image was controversial in a larger audience. |
| Appropriation | <p>Was the image appropriated and redistributed outside of the original distribution location? Who appropriated it? How was the image characterized in the redistribution?</p> <p>Yes. The image appeared in a number of media outlets. Some responses were positive and some are negative. Some responses reacted positively to the ideas that women in the military were being depicted as mothers and that it suggested that there is strength in motherhood. Other responses, including some responses from women serving in the military, suggested that women in uniform should not be seen nursing in public because this undermines the efforts of women in the military to be seen as equal to men. For them, seeing women in uniform nursing will cause their male counterparts to view them differently.</p> |
| Success of Argument | <p>Was the image successful in making an argument?</p> <p>For some it was, but for others the argument was overshadowed because the image pointed out the embodied nature of women in uniform.</p> |

Theoretical Lenses

| Variables | Questions |
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| Ontological Lens | <p>Social Constructivism How is reality constructed in the image? What is the ideology being presented in the image? Whose version of reality is being presented?</p> <p>The reality of these mothers experiences are presented through the wearing of the military uniform. This presents the idea that women occupy a number of roles. Because they are smiling, the image suggests that they occupy these roles confidently and that they do not feel</p> |

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| | <p>constrained by either role. The image presents the idea that they do not feel constrained by any of the roles that they play.</p> |
| <p>Application of Theoretical Methodology</p> | <p>Rhetorics of Display (Prelli) How is the artifact situated within the context? What perspectives are revealed in the image? What perspectives are concealed? What did the audience believe was revealed? What was the audience see as being concealed? What conflicting ideas, ideologies, and values are exhibited through the audience’s perception of the artifact?</p> <p>The images seem to suggest that these mothers feel confident in the various roles that they play and are not constrained by the duality of their existence. Some commenters who responded to the image said that the mother of twins was revealing too much, while the other mother’s image was seen as less controversial.</p> <p>The fact that the blonde mother was looking at the camera and holding her children in a pose that looks a bit more awkward and less natural than the pose of the other mother and child suggests that she is displaying the breastfeeding for a purpose, while the brunette mother is focused on her child and seems to be in a natural pose. Lunceford might take more issue with the blonde mother’s pose and claim that she is undermining attempts to normalize breastfeeding more than the other mother. However, to make that claim, one would have to be suggesting that there is an appropriate way for mothers to behave will breastfeeding. To suggest that there should only be a focus on the baby and not the external world suggests that breastfeeding g is otherworldly, in need of protection, and that breastfeeding mother-child couples cannot or should not have full interaction with the wider world.</p> <p>The image does not focus on the obstacles or struggles that working breastfeeding mothers face, such as places to pump, potential separations from their children, a masculine environment, resistance to putting femininity on display. The audience was conflicted in that some felt that the images presented strength in motherhood, while others felt that the image revealed too much about the embodied nature of motherhood and that military women should not advertise their feminine embodiment. It was not until January of 2013 (the following year) that the ban on women in combat roles was lifted. Those who wanted to see women allowed in combat may have had reservations about the display of maternal embodiment.</p> |