

Name

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Mass Communications

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### Writing Assignment #2: Ethics

On September 2, 2015, the largest newspaper in Germany *Bild*, published a startling photograph of a young boy, Aylan Kurdi, approximately three years old lying face down, lifeless after being washed up ashore in Turkey. Aylan Kurdi was a refugee who joined thousands of others who fled Syria, crossing the Mediterranean Sea in hopes of a better life. This young boy was just one person, among thousands who have lost their lives while attempting to flee Syria. The newspaper received instant negative criticism from viewers across the world, as the photo was shared across various websites and news outlets. Commentators proclaimed that the photograph was much too graphic to publish and the image was very disturbing for such a large media outlet to print. The following day *Bild* published an entire newspaper with absolutely no photographs, all images were blurred out. This brought on even more negative attention to the newspaper, as many found their reaction to criticism to be childish and immature.

As an ombudsman, I understand the concerns and trouble *Bild's* audience has with the photograph of a young boy who drowned being published. As a result of the public's uproar, after not only the image being released, but *Bild's* response to the criticism, damage control would be difficult, but not impossible. I would first issue an apology to those offended by the image published and the newspaper's response to the public. In the apology I would also include that the Syrian refugee crisis is a very serious and current issue. The image was not meant to offend readers, but simply inform them on the very honest reality of lives of Syrian refugees

escaping their home country. Following the release of the statement, I would change the original photograph included in the article on the newspaper's website, and replace it with a less controversial photograph, that still highlights what it's like for Syrian refugees to arrive in a new country.

According to "Mass Communication: Living in a Media World" by Ralph E. Hanson, ethics are a rational way of deciding what is good for individuals or society. By applying the Bok Model for Ethical Decision making to my ethical issue, I have decided that I believe the photograph *Bild* published was very graphic, and should not have been published in the newspaper. Though I do believe that the Syrian refugee crisis is a very troubling and harsh reality, as an alternative there could have been a less offensive photograph published that still achieved the same goal of grabbing the reader's attention and providing information on the crisis. Also, I do not believe it was necessary for *Bild* to have the response in which they choose to release. Before releasing the photograph, I would have asked not only myself, but other newspaper staff members, *If I was a mother would I be disturbed by this photo? Would my family members, friends, or neighbors with children in their lives feel offended by this photograph?* My response would be yes, many people could find this image offensive. Yes the photograph, creates conversation, but not all conversation is good conversation. The image is raw and sadly a very common site to see while helping Syrian refugees arriving on a Turkish beach, but other photographs could have achieved that goal in a less controversial manner.

The decisions made by *Bild* suggests that there may not have been an ombudsman employed at the newspaper. The decision made to publish the original photograph of Aylan Kurdi and the newspaper's immediate response, did not necessarily consider the audience's thoughts or comments. I would have never published the original photograph, and simply choose

a less graphic one. I also would not chosen to respond to criticism by releasing a photo-less edition of the newspaper. Instead, I would listen to the majority of the audience and admit I made a mistake. Following, I would release a public statement, and proceed to change the original article and allow the public's negative uproar to settle, and continue doing my job.