

# Look In The Mirror For An Interesting Ethical Dispute

[blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2014/04/16/look-in-the-mirror-for-an-interesting-ethical-dispute/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2014/04/16/look-in-the-mirror-for-an-interesting-ethical-dispute/)

2014-4-16

Should you use a stock photograph in a front page story to represent real suffering?

Media analyst [Dan Barker's blog](#) feature's a Daily Mirror front page about what it describes as the scandal of the growth of food banks in Britain:



Does it matter?

I think it does matter. It's not the end of the world and it should not distract from the real story but it does slightly undermine the Mirror's credibility.

Firstly, in an age of spin and fakery – especially through social networks – it is good for mainstream journalists to be as straight as possible.

Secondly, they could have taken a real picture (a real family is featured inside the paper).

Thirdly, this was a front page visual lead – the photo IS the big impact of the story, so the fact it is a stock photo undermines its authenticity.

Fourthly, this is an emotive issue. The growth of food banks is not all about poverty. There is a real debate to be had around this issue. By manipulation the Mirror slightly undermines its case.

I don't think this is a huge ethical issue, but imagine if the Mail had done this about, say, immigration. Would people be annoyed?

We live in an age when journalists have to fight for credibility from a sceptical public – this kind of technique doesn't help.

On Twitter, the Mirror's online photography editor defended its use:



The image shows a vertical scroll of six tweets from Margot Huysman (@margotlily), posted 8 hours ago. Each tweet includes a profile picture of her and a list of replies. The tweets discuss the use of stock photos in journalism, specifically in the context of a story about a crying child. The tweets are as follows:

- Tweet 1:** @richsimcox @jamesrbuk @CharlieBeckett illustrate rape stories/domestic abuse stories. Are they fake? Should a story not make the front page
- Tweet 2:** @richsimcox @jamesrbuk @CharlieBeckett stock pix are usually used to illustrate stories. A crying child illustrates this one. Shadows often
- Tweet 3:** @richsimcox @jamesrbuk @CharlieBeckett if we've shopped the boy into a foodbank, then we'd be in trouble. But we'd never do that
- Tweet 4:** @jamesrbuk @CharlieBeckett They are 'real' pictures inside, but I don't think a stock pic takes anything away from it.
- Tweet 5:** @CharlieBeckett @jamesrbuk family affected by this. The story is out there; it's real and that's what's important
- Tweet 6:** @CharlieBeckett @jamesrbuk if we had gone out and made a child cry, we'd be slated for that, too. Inside pages have pictures of a real

So hardly the biggest ethical crisis facing journalism today and there are far worse examples of distortion around.

The Mirror is a great paper and very driven by a moral perspective. Which is exactly why I think this was a mistake.

- Copyright © 2014 London School of Economics and Political Science