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Case Study:
Was Arthur Ashe's right to privacy violated?

The *USA Today* reporter who decided to write and publish a story about Arthur Ashe and the AIDS virus he was infected with was doing his job by informing the public of the truth about a professional tennis player. While undergoing heart surgery, Ashe acquired HIV through a blood transfusion, a mistake clearly committed by the medical team. The dilemma in this case study would be whether or not the reporter should publish the story outing Ashe or respect his privacy and keep his medical information private.

When reviewing this case using The Potter Box method, it is important to examine the facts of the case, consider the reporters loyalties, review personal values and consider appropriate principles. In order to review the loyalties in this case, we must take a look at the loyalty the reporter had to Ashe, as well as the public. As stated in this case, the reporter was a friend of Ashe's and was asked not to write the story by Ashe himself. After carefully considering this loyalty, I concluded the reporters loyalty to the public was more important.

I also used J.S Mill's Utilitarianism method to support the reporters decision to write a story on Ashe. This perspective takes into consideration the consequences when making decisions and concludes that the best action is that which brings the greatest happiness or least suffering results in. When taking Utilitarianism into consideration, thinking of the larger picture is more important than a single individual, which is why the reporter should have written a story about Ashe. Outing the unfortunate circumstances of his procedure could benefit the public.

According to the Nine Principles, a journalist's obligation is to the truth and their first loyalty is to citizens. This particular case study is chance to write about a medical practice that not only failed someone by infecting them with the HIV virus but could also affect other people. What if the journalist had never considered publishing the story and someone else was infected with HIV through a blood transfusion done by that same practice? Journalists are obligated to seek and report the truth and if this unfortunate situation provides the opportunity to help people realize they need to be more careful, I think it's appropriate to side with a reporter's obligation to report news and not a person's right to privacy.

Publishing a story about Ashe's illness could expose the careless error of the team that worked on him that day and would not shine a bad light on Ashe. According to the SPJ Code of Ethics, journalists must "weigh the consequences of publishing or broadcasting personal information." These circumstances are an opportunity to change the way some people think about the AIDS virus and reconsider the safety behind medical procedures.

During this time, the general public was not properly educated on the AIDS and it was believed only those engaging in same-sex relationships were at risk. As a public figure, Ashe can take the opportunity to make this situation into a positive one and bring more awareness to the AIDS virus, which has affected millions of people.

The Nine Principles also discuss a journalist's duty to keep the news comprehensive and proportional, which is why gathering information from all sides on this specific situation would justify the reporter's reason for writing the story. According to the SPJ Code of Ethics, a journalist must "boldly tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of human experience" and "seek sources whose voices we seldom hear."

As a reporter, I would take this story and give it multiple perspectives allowing it to have proportional coverage by including Ashe's voice, contacting the surgeon and medical team who were in charge of his procedure, and reaching out to assistance groups/medical teams and other resources who have worked with people battling the AIDS virus. It is the reporter's obligation to inform people about the truth of living with AIDS and the mistake that occurred during Ashe's heart surgery. In my opinion, this case study is about the bigger picture and not only about one public figure's right to privacy.