Case 10-5 The Online Birth and News Value

Moral Agent: Lionel St. Clair, Channel 9 senior anchor and managing editor

Question: How to integrate the website material of the graphic visual of live birth

Issue: Martha “Elizabeth” Albright waited 7 years and took fertility drugs when 7 months later she gave birth to septuplets. She went through labor while video taped live onto a website. Channel 9’s, Marvin Whitelaw, recorded the entire occurrence. Lionel St. Clair now wrestles with the idea of running the raw footage, masking it or not using it at all.

Other Major Figures: - Marvin Whitelaw – channel 9 producer
- Cynthia Crabtree – channel 9 anchor and assisting managing editor

SAD Analysis
Situation: - material would be worth of a slot in the station’s agenda
- the footage is very graphic and uninhibited
- the material may be offensive to many people
- privacy may not be an issue since the Albrights arranged the entire event

Analysis: - value of the first woman to have multiple births via the internet
- notion of privacy and publicizing (TV station)
- need for visual evidence to support narration
- not following journalistic responsibility if they omit or alter shots of birth
- potential harm of crossing the line with graphic footage
- other stations may or may not use the footage to their advantage
- question of birth being a private event

Moral Theories
A) Deontological: - duty to report story
- duty to be ethical/objective in reporting

B) Teleological: - harm to innocent viewers of graphic footage
- harm to Albright Family’s privacy
- damage to credibility of station if it does not run the story
- potential harm of exceeding the boundaries of decency

C) Value: station could run the story without the most graphic scenes of footage

Decision: Channel 9 should not withdraw the story altogether. If the goal of channel 9 is to show the story straight on, it can be done without using graphic images, though not as effectively. They should at least try to cover the story while omitting the most graphic footage. This would allow for them to cover the story without invading privacy or crossing boundaries.