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ISSUE REACTION PAPER ASSIGNMENT #1

Issue: Media Coverage

Case: Manti Te’o’s Dead Fake Girlfriend

Has the media coverage of Notre Dame football player Manti Te'o been appropriate? Could the media have done more to uncover the hoax? What are the media ethical issues involved in the Manti Te'o hoax?

Timothy Burke and Jack Dickey writer of the article “Manti Te’o’s Dead Girlfriend, The Most Heartbreaking And Inspirational Story Of The College Football Season, Is A Hoax” (Jan 16, 2013) did the best they could possibly do to uncover the hoax. The timeline in the article included the day Te’o and Lennay Kekua met, when they officially became a couple, interviews where he mentioned her, random tweets where he tagged her, phone calls, her death date, and other personal information which included comments from Te’o’s father Brian and a phone call from Kekua’s brother. The timeline makes the reader believe the relationship is real, especially since Te’o is so open to the press about his relationship. It wasn’t until the real girl in the picture whose name wasn’t Lennay came forward where things turned fishy.

At that moment the media had to do some poking around to find out what was really going on. Sure privacy and accuracy are an issue in this case but most of the information released was information on the internet, which is not a private place or from a reliable source in an interview. Manti Te’o was very open about his relationship with Kekua from the very beginning so when the story blew up about his fake girlfriend he had to come out with the more information for damage control. After he confessed his relationship was strictly online the other parties included came forward. As time progressed the story started to unravel its self. Te'o has said since the hoax was exposed that he was the victim of an elaborate prank, that he never met Kekua and that his acquaintance Tuiasosopo admitted to him that he was the one who played the part of Lennay. (Reuters, Janurary 30, 2013). Then the truth was out.

I feel the whole story is ridiculous from the very beginning. Te’o should not have been so open about his relationship since he never met the girl. The way technology and social media is used these days is convincing people they are in real relationships when they are not. People can be whoever they want to be on the internet. Desperate people will do whatever it takes to get what they want. A good example of a desperate person is Tuiasosopo. Who confessed to Dr. Phil that the relationship he had with the linebacker as he was posing as Lennay was a romantic relationship for him (Reuters, Janurary 30, 2013). Tuiasosopo used an innocent women’s Facebook picture to pretended to be a girl on the internet and imitated a girls voice over the phone to get romantically involved with Manti Te’o. I also do not think Te’o had anything to do with the hoax because during the Katie Couric interview, he presented a voice mail he received from the person he said he thought was Kekua. "Doesn't that sound like a girl?" Te'o told Couric (Reuters, Janurary 30, 2013).

The way the media covered this story to me was very ethical and morally correct because everybody who was involved in the hoax wanted to share their side of the story. All the media had to do was piece it together in one big fat fake timeline. The truth eventually came out on its own.