

Case 5-A

Anderson Cooper's Not-so-Private Life

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In July 2012, CNN's Anderson Cooper confirmed what had been an ill-kept professional secret.

"The fact is, I'm gay, always have been, always will be, and I couldn't be any more happy, comfortable with myself, and proud," Cooper wrote to Andrew Sullivan, who published the statement on his Daily Beast blog.

The fact that Cooper confirmed that he is gay was news, perhaps, to the average CNN viewer. For those in the extended media world, the statement was—well—not news. As early as 2007, *Out* magazine had ranked Cooper as the second most influential gay man in the US. His sexual orientation had been published in, among other places, the New York Times, but Cooper himself had refused to either confirm or deny the accuracy of the reports, saying that he wanted to do nothing that would cause others to question his neutrality as a journalist.

Cooper is what many would dub a celebrity broadcaster, but he has had more reason than most to consider the implications of privacy on himself as a person and on his professional career.

Cooper was born on June 3, 1967, to fashion designer and heiress Gloria Vanderbilt and her fourth husband, writer Wyatt Cooper. Gloria Vanderbilt was often the subject of media coverage and admittedly sought such attention through most of her life, including the publication of memoirs that detailed many of her affairs. Cooper's father died when he was 10.

Anderson Cooper became a Ford model when he was 11. The adult looked back on that initial employment as an attempt to be "financially independent" from his incredibly wealthy family. He graduated from Yale University in 1989, one year after his older brother committed suicide by jumping from the Vanderbilt's 14th floor New York apartment, an event that received significant news coverage as well as first-person account of the event by his mother. Cooper credits his brother's suicide with initiating his interest in journalism.

In 1992, Cooper began to work as a fact checker with Channel One, a television channel that was (and still is) broadcast in to many public school classrooms. Cooper covered the democracy movement in Burma on forged press credentials; his reports from there ultimately aired on Channel One. That effort was followed by reporting from Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda.

In 1995, Cooper became a correspondent for ABC News, a post he left in 2000 to host a reality television program called *The Mole*. He left that program after the terrorist attacks of 2001 to return to news.

Cooper's career moved to the next level during his coverage of Hurricane Katrina, when he confronted a number of political figures about the frequently incompetent response of the state and federal governments to the disaster. Cooper is the first and best known of a new breed of television news anchors who combine emotion with traditional reporting; he has been called the "anchor of the future."

Micro Issues

1. Is Cooper's sexual orientation news? Should it be news?

2. Is Cooper a celebrity? A journalist?
3. Does his sexual orientation compromise his journalistic standards? In what ways? On what sorts of stories?
4. Would your answers be different if Cooper were elected to public office? The CEO of a Wall Street firm?

Mid-range Issues

1. Journalists often work for organizations that require them to have a “Facebook presence”. What sort of information should be on such a professional Facebook Page?
2. Is Cooper’s often emotional reporting from disaster-torn regions journalism? Why or why not? Does such emotional coverage compromise objectivity?
3. Cooper has said that his mother’s publicity seeking prompted him to consider another way to live an adult life. How would you connect this statement to the concept of privacy, in both a legal and an ethical sense.
4. Is it possible to regain professional journalistic standing after hosting a reality television program?

Macro Issues

1. Reconcile the concepts of transparency and privacy, as you understand them.
2. Are the privacy standards for people like Anderson Cooper philosophically different from those for the people whose arrests are reported on blabbermouthkc and similar websites?
3. What are some contexts, for example boarding an airplane, in which you are willing to give up some privacy? Why? How do these contexts fit the sorts of information-based privacy issues raised in the chapter?