

Bill Sourour was a coder for a marketing firm in Canada where his work consisted of designing and creating web elements and other software for mostly pharmaceutical companies. During his work, he had a project where he had to program a quiz to determine the correct prescription based on your quiz answers. However, there was a catch. Every single quiz result led to the answer being the client's drug. This already put Sourour on edge but decided it was best to just keep his head down and work. Later on, he learned that a girl prescribed that medication ended up committing suicide almost as a direct side effect of the drug. This didn't sit well with Sourour at all, and left him questioning the ethicality of his work. In this case analysis, I will use the Ethics of Care model to demonstrate that Sourour, while regretting his decision, acted unethically with his part in advertising the drug.

Using the code of ethics from IEEE, ACM, and the code of ethics for Engineers, we can logically analyze if Sourour acted unethically according to the laid out guidelines. In order to properly analyze this situation, we need to take from these codes only the relevant pieces of information. In the code of ethics for IEEE, this would be points one, two, three, and nine. Points one through three state that one should first and foremost hold the safety, health, and welfare of the public in the highest regard. Failing to disclose the potentially hazardous side effects is in violation of this point. Point two talks about avoiding conflict of interest. This was clearly violated by making every single answer on a quiz meant to determine the best drug for your situation the client's, who hired Sourour to make the quiz. The third point states that it is the ethical duty of the employee to make honest and realistic claims based on available data. Making the quiz recommend the client's drug violates this point as it does not convey to users that there are other, possibly more relevant options of drug choices available. The ninth point in this guidebook is the large one that left Sourour extremely distraught. After a young girl (the target demographic of the quiz) commits suicide as a result of the side effects of the drugs, he begins to truly question his morality in playing his part with the creation and assistance of this drug.

Analyzing the case of Bill Sourour through the IEEE and ACM codes of ethics, several key principles were noted. Most importantly, these principles were the duty to prioritize public health, honest representation, and avoiding conflicts of interest. Sourour violated these when he allowed a client's commercial interests to override transparent communication about the drugs' possible side effects. Viewed through the ethics of care lens, this case takes on a deeper significance. Ethics of care emphasizes relationships, empathy, and interdependence. From this perspective, the moral failure lies not only in the breach of professional standard, but also in the failure to care for the users taking the quiz. Being that the target demographic was young girls, these especially vulnerable individuals were subject to an unjust marketing strategy. Ultimately, this led to Sourour being complicit in the unethical practice of the pharmaceutical company he was working for.

Had Sourour acted from an ethic of care, he would prioritize the well being of the vulnerable target the quiz was aiming for by either changing the way the quiz works or abstaining from the creation in the quiz. This would have honored the interdependence between the coders and society at large by rejecting the attempt to capitalize on this vulnerable part of the same society Sourour lives in. By choosing care over compliance, he could have helped foster mutual trust and accountability between the tech industry and the public. The right thing to do would have been to raise concerns, advocate for transparency, and refuse participation if ethical standards were not met.

Looking at Mary Beth Armstrong's "Confidentiality: A Comparison Across the Professions of Medicine, Engineering and Accounting", we are introduced to the concept of *prima facie*. This refers to a duty or obligation that is binding unless it conflicts with a more important duty or responsibility. You should follow a *prima facie* unless you are given explicit reason not to. For example, if your *prima facie* were to keep a promise, but keeping that promise would cause harm to someone, the duty to prevent the harm outweighs and overrules your *prima facie* to keep the secret.

Applying this to the case of Sourour, the *prima facie* Bill had was to A) keep the rigged quiz a secret, B) ensure that it worked seamlessly and discretely, and C) promoted the client's drug everytime. The *prima facie* was clear to Bill and the work he completed complied with it. One could argue that Sourour did indeed follow his *prima facie* despite knowingly causing harm to vulnerable teenagers, however I believe there is an argument to be made regarding the knowledge and actions Sourour took. We are told that Sourour only learns of the side effects and victim AFTER he finished the project. This distinction I believe can argue in Bill's defense as if he truly remained ignorant to the fact that the drug being promoted could cause harm, then his decision to follow the *prima facie* duties set by his employer may seem justifiable at the time. Consider he is a young adult, looking for any sort of income and would act similarly to many his age. However, once Sourour became aware of the consequences of his work, his ethical responsibility shifted. In that moment the duty to care for others and prevent harm outweighed his employer's *prima facie*. Continuing to remain silent and even continuing to work with the client would then constitute a negative ethical decision.

Through the lens of ethics of care, he would have had to think about his connection to the people using the quiz. These were not faceless machines, but rather vulnerable young girls and failing to empathize and hold the best interest of them in mind is an unethical decision. Ethics of care holds empathy as one of its pillar traits, and being empathetic in retrospect is great, but failing to advocate or try to rectify any wrongdoing is almost as bad as creating the quiz in the first place. Bill's mistake was not just a failure to follow professional guidelines, but rather a failure to care for those who would be interacting with the quiz and his direct work. While he may not have known the full extent of the harm beforehand, a deeper engagement with the project and its intent might have revealed enough warning signs to elicit an appropriate response for

opposition. The right course of action, according to ethics of care would have been for Bill to raise concerns and keep the interest and health of those interacting with his work as his primary concern, superseding his prima facie. Bill ultimately acted unethically, both by creating the quiz in the first place and failing to advocate and warn after he learned of the drug's dangerous side effects.

In conclusion, Bill Sourour acted unethically by participating in the development of a misleading pharmaceutical quiz as part of a web development contracting job. He continued to act unethically by failing to take adequate action once he learned about the harm it caused. By applying the ethics of care and the concept of prima facie from Armstrong, it's even more clear that his greatest ethical failure was his lack of empathy and responsibility toward the vulnerable target users. While yes, Bill was "just doing his job" and he did lack the authority to refuse work and raise credible concerns, he still needs to be held to an ethical standard like everyone else. Ethics of care would suggest that you should not just follow orders or go with the crowd, but rather, think about those around you and who might be impacted by your actions and decisions made by your own free will.

Signature: _____

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Bill Sourour", written over a horizontal line.