

Natalie Cassidy v Woman

Clauses noted: 1

Natalie Cassidy, Big Shot Productions and Universal Studios complained to the Press Complaints Commission through Schillings solicitors that an article published in the 7 April 2008 edition of Woman magazine headlined "The gym or him?" was inaccurate in breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Code.

The complaint was upheld.

The article reported that a source at the Esporta gym had told the magazine that Ms Cassidy visited the gym five days a week when "she was preparing for her" weight-loss DVD. This was denied by the complainants' solicitors, who said that she had lost weight exclusively by doing the exercises in her DVD, rather than by going to any gym.

The magazine said that stating that she had been to the gym did not rule out the possibility that she had been following her own exercises there: it was not the case that everyone who visited a gym necessarily used the equipment. It pointed to a piece in another magazine dated 12-18 April in which Ms Cassidy admitted to working out at a gym. It had published a "follow-up piece" – which was agreed after the magazine originally received the complaint – which effectively offered the complainants a full right of reply.

The complainants' solicitors said the "follow-up piece" was arranged before any complaint was made about the article under dispute, as part of the publicity for the DVD rather than as redress for the article. The article in the other magazine was irrelevant as it described Ms Cassidy's efforts to maintain her weight after the release of her DVD, whereas the complaint was about the claim that she used the gym before its release.

Adjudication

The Commission has previously made clear that, while it does not expect publications to identify confidential sources of information, they should either supply on-the-record corroboration or offer an opportunity to reply when the accuracy of an anonymous source is questioned. The magazine had done neither in this case, resulting in a breach of Clause 1. The article referring to the complainant attending a gym after the release of her DVD did not corroborate the claim that she went before its release.

It was also regrettable that the magazine had taken seven weeks to respond to the Commission during the investigation into this complaint. This was an unacceptable amount of time to deal with this relatively straightforward matter.

Adjudication issued 18/12/2008