

Ms Michelle Ryan v Star Magazine

Clauses noted: 3

Ms Michelle Ryan of London complained to the Press Complaints Commission through A&J management that an article published in Star magazine on 12 July 2004 headlined "Neighbourhood Celebwatch" intruded into her private life in breach of Clause 3 (Privacy) of the Code of Practice.

The complaint was not upheld.

The article described in general terms the area in which the complainant lived and provided a number of photographs of places where she allegedly spent time – including her home, her gym and a number of local shops. While her home address was not specified, the complainant suggested that the information provided in the article – particularly in relation to the gym – was sufficient to compromise her security by enabling people to trace her whereabouts.

The magazine did not accept that it had breached the Code, but offered to resolve the complaint in any case by writing to the complainant to apologise for any offence or distress caused by the piece. In addition, it said that it would take more care in the future in relation to any use of photographs of Ms Ryan and any accompanying copy.

The complainant's agent did not consider the magazine's offered remedy to the complaint to be sufficient, and suggested that the magazine should publish an apology.

Adjudication

The Commission has previously censured publications which identify the precise location of the homes of high-profile individuals, mindful of the particular security problems that can arise as a result.

In this case, while the Commission could understand why the complainant was uncomfortable with the published article and pictures, it concluded that they did not breach the Code for three principal reasons. Firstly, the Commission was not persuaded that the magazine had provided sufficient information for people who were unfamiliar with the complainant to cause a nuisance to her, for instance by turning up at her home. Secondly, the photographs of buildings and shops in her neighbourhood – taken from public places – did not include the complainant herself. She had not therefore been followed or endured any physical intrusion by journalists or photographers as she went about her daily business. Thirdly, there was no actual evidence that the article had led to any security problems for the complainant.

Having said that, there is a particular need for vigilance in this area, and the Commission therefore welcomed the magazine's attempts to resolve the matter, and especially the undertaking to take more care when dealing with such features in future.

Relevant rulings

Dynamite v Islington Gazette, 2003

A well-known entertainer v Mail on Sunday, 2000

Adjudication issued 2004