

A woman v News of the World

Clauses noted: 3

A woman complained to the Press Complaints Commission on behalf of her daughter that an article published in the News of the World on 17 September 2006 headlined 'Lady Mucky wanted me rough and ready!' intruded into her daughter's privacy in breach of Clause 3 (Privacy) of the Code of Practice.

The complaint was upheld.

The article was an account, from the man's point of view, of an affair between a man and a married woman whose husband was a member of an aristocratic family. The account included sexual details. The woman's mother said that there was no public interest for publishing the story.

The newspaper noted that the complainant's daughter had already spoken briefly to the Daily Mail and her remarks, confirming the affair, had been published (a complaint was also made about this newspaper). It was only fair that the man with whom she had a relationship should have a chance to give his side of the story.

The complainant said her daughter had simply responded to a question from a Daily Mail reporter, but she would have preferred the whole matter to have remained private and had not sought publicity for the affair. Her daughter was not a celebrity, and did not deserve to have intimate information about her private life published in the press. Moreover, her judgement had been affected by the bipolar disorder from which she was suffering – something that was known to the man who gave the interview.

The newspaper wrote to the complainant to express its regret for distress caused to her daughter.

Adjudication

When reporting one party's account of a relationship, newspapers must also have regard to the other person's right to respect for their private life.

Some of the detail in the article – particularly the description of sexual activity – was of an intimate nature. The piece revealed matters that would normally be regarded as private. The newspaper would either have needed some public interest for doing so, or been able to show that the complainant had previously been happy to discuss similar matters in such detail. Neither of these possible defences was a feature in this case. The information contained in the article was out of proportion to that already in the public domain. The complainant had not courted publicity, and any limited public interest inherent in exposing adultery committed by someone who was married into an aristocratic family was insufficient to justify the level of detail in the piece. There was an intrusion into the woman's privacy and the complaint was upheld.

Relevant rulings

Jones v Daily Sport, 2003

Feltz v Sunday Mirror & Daily Mirror, 2001

Adjudication issued 29/01/2007