

Natalie Cassidy, the PCC and Woman

Clauses noted: 1

In December 2008, the Press Complaints Commission upheld a complaint from Natalie Cassidy, Big Shot Productions and Universal Studios against Woman magazine. The Commission has now issued a further rebuke to the magazine for not publishing its ruling in full, with due prominence and with a headline reference to the PCC, as it was required by the Editors' Code of Practice to do.

Ms Cassidy's complaint related to an article which claimed – on the basis of information from a confidential source – that she had regularly visited a gym when she was 'preparing for' the filming of her weight-loss DVD. Her solicitors denied this and said she had lost weight exclusively by doing the exercises in her DVD.

Since the magazine could not provide on-the-record corroboration of its source's claim, and had not offered Ms Cassidy the opportunity to set out her denial, the Commission concluded that there had been a breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Code of Practice. The Commission's ruling appeared on page 30 of the 23 February edition with the heading 'Natalie Cassidy'. Around half of the text of the ruling was not included.

The magazine said it had used the headline 'Natalie Cassidy' instead of a reference to the PCC because it wanted to ensure that readers' attention was drawn to the piece. It argued that most of the omitted text referred to a description of the magazine's own defence of the original article. This, it said, would have meant little to readers. As for prominence, the ruling had been published in the first half of the magazine on a page that was the regular spot for response to content (the letters' page). Moreover, an additional sentence had been included after the PCC's ruling, which made clear that Woman accepted its error.

Adjudication

Despite these arguments, it was not for the magazine to edit the ruling. Part of the penalty for breaching the Code is having to publish the Commission's criticisms in full.

In this case, the original article had appeared on a double-page spread over pages 8 and 9.

Publishing the PCC's ruling on page 30 was insufficiently prominent. The ruling appeared in a smaller typeface than the rest of the page. There was no reference to the PCC in the headline to the ruling. And the text of the ruling had been edited. All of this was unacceptable. The Commission took a dim view of this conduct, which regrettably showed that the editor was not aware of her obligations under the Code of Practice.

The Commission now requires the editor to publish this statement, in full and with due prominence, in a subsequent edition of the magazine. The original adjudication can be read at www.pcc.org.uk.

Adjudication issued 13/03/2009