

Ms Alicia Singh v Closer

Clauses noted: 1

Ms Alicia Singh complained to the Press Complaints Commission that an article headlined 'I was drunk when I went into labour', published in Closer magazine on 8 November 2008, was distorted in breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the editors' Code of Practice.

The complaint was upheld.

The article was about the complainant having a baby when she had not known she was pregnant. She did not dispute the thrust of the article – that she had drunk alcohol while pregnant, sometimes to excess – but said it exaggerated the scale of her drinking both in general terms and in relation to specific incidents. Further distortions included the extent to which she recalled her son's conception; her fears of what was wrong with her when she was admitted to hospital (not knowing that she was pregnant); and her feelings towards her son when he was first born. She said that a number of direct quotes were invented.

The magazine stood by its story and provided a transcript of its interviews with the complainant to back up its position. It subsequently provided the tapes of the interviews, but these revealed to the Commission that the original transcripts were incomplete. The magazine said that, while the transcripts did not contain the direct quotes disputed by the complainant, the thrust of the story was correct. The journalist had drawn on other, unrecorded conversations with the complainant – although the complainant denied that these had taken place.

Adjudication

The Commission accepts that, in the preparation of real-life stories, magazines will often edit considerable amounts of material to present the story in a readable way. However, it is important that in doing so the information is not significantly distorted.

In this instance, the magazine had exaggerated a number of important points – particularly relating to the complainant's drinking, but also her recollection of the child's conception and how she felt about him on birth. In doing so, it had also fabricated some of the direct quotes from the complainant. The effect of this was to distort the story in breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy). This serious breach of the Code was compounded by the provision of inaccurate transcripts to the Commission, about which the Commission wished publicly to express its concern.

Adjudication issued 30/04/2009