

PCC upholds complaint against Sunday World for undercover reporting of sex event

The PCC has today upheld a complaint against the Sunday World under Clauses 1 (Accuracy), 3 (Privacy) and 10 (Clandestine devices and subterfuge) of the Editors' Code of Practice over two articles which exposed a "shocking new sex craze" (known as "bukake") which was taking place in Ulster.

The complainant was the organiser of sex events. He was concerned that the newspaper had used subterfuge as part of its investigation into his (legal) business activities: the newspaper's coverage included stills from footage shot using a hidden camera by an undercover reporter who had attended part of one event. He also said that various claims made by the newspaper (including that he charged an entrance fee for people to attend the events and made "big money" from them) were untrue.

The newspaper argued that the coverage could be justified in the public interest: a senior medical officer had claimed that the participants were at risk from sexually-transmitted infections. The complainant disagreed, and said there were no public health issues.

In its ruling, the Commission made clear that, although the newspaper was entitled to report on, and comment robustly about, the sex industry in its local area, it was "not free to pursue any journalistic approach to do so". The filming and the published images constituted a "serious intrusion" which required a high level of public interest to justify. In the Commission's view, the defence put forward by the newspaper did not justify the use of the hidden camera: the newspaper could have exposed the existence of bukake parties (and any attendant health risks) without undercover footage of this type.

The Commission also found a breach of Clause 1 on the basis that the newspaper had not provided sufficient evidence to support its assertion that the complainant was making "big money" from bukake events; nor had it provided any evidence for two further claims related to the complainant and his wife.

The full text of the adjudication, which was published yesterday, can be found [here](#).

PCC Director Stephen Abell commented: "The Editors' Code of Practice enforced by the PCC contains strong provisions to protect people's privacy, especially in regard to the use of images taken in private places. The Commission has always rightly set a high bar for the use of material from hidden cameras, and the newspaper's justification did not reach that level here".

ENDS

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