

2019:77 Coakley vs Hamilton Spectator

September 12, 2019

The National NewsMedia Council has mediated and found that corrective action was taken to address a complaint about the headline and caption of a September 4, 2019 news article, "Police probe double stabbing in west Hamilton," published in the Hamilton Spectator.

The article was a brief report about a stabbing that occurred in a west Hamilton neighbourhood and an ongoing police investigation in the area.

The complainant, Mark Coakley, argued that the news article did not accurately identify the neighbourhood where the incident occurred. He stated that the incident occurred in his own neighbourhood of Ainslie Wood, rather than in the neighbouring area of Westdale. The complainant was also highly concerned about a perceived trend in prejudicial reporting on certain neighbourhoods. He pointed to the Hamilton Spectator's series, "Code Red," as an example of reporting that explored neighbourhood inequity in the city.

Deliberating on wider trends in reporting and the issue of neighbourhood inequity is beyond the mandate of the NewsMedia Council. However, the NNC understands as a general principle the concern about the impact of stereotyping geographical locations and is of the view that the news media should not perpetuate community discrimination or stereotyping.

The NNC found no evidence to support the claim that the article in question perpetuated stereotypes of Hamilton neighbourhoods. The NNC further noted that the Spectator's decision to revisit its 2010 series "Code Red" in recent reporting, as cited by the complainant, can be viewed as evidence that the news organization has taken a proactive role in investigating and explaining the roots and current status of those inequities.

In reviewing the portion of the complaint about the accuracy of the headline and caption, the NNC noted that the information cited in the article originated from a police press release. The police information stated that the incident took place in the "Westdale area." In the story posted online by the Hamilton Spectator, the headline and article identified the location of the incident as occurring in "west Hamilton." In this way, the article differed from the police press release.

The NNC noted, however, that the caption below a photo accompanying the article identified the incident as occurring in "Westdale." Upon being notified of this by the NNC, the news organization took swift action to correct the geographical reference in the caption.

The NNC commends the news organization's prompt correction of an error, and views the corrective action as appropriate remedy to ensure accuracy. It thanks both parties for their cooperation and for the opportunity to consider this matter.