[GB] Context and Mode of Publication Relevant to Libel Action

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In a recent libel case the House of Lords has held that, in order to determine the meaning of certain words, it is necessary to take into account the context in which the words were used and the mode of publication. Plaintiffs were two actors in a popular television series, whose faces were superimposed on pornographic pictures in a computer game. The News of the World published an article on the computer game with two photographs of the visual display, under the headline "Strewth! What's Harold up to with our Madge?". The text of the article explained that the plaintiffs were the unwitting victims of the publishers of the game. The plaintiffs brought proceedings for libel against the newspaper, alleging that its article suggested that they had posed for pornographic pictures. In dismissing the claim, the House of Lords held that a plaintiff could not select an isolated passage in an article and complain of that alone, if other parts of the article threw a different light on that passage.

Charleston and another v News Group Newspapers Ltd. and another, House of Lords, 25-26 January, 30 March 1995.

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