



18 August 2006

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National Editor
The Associated Press
450 W. 33rd St.,
New York, NY 10001

I am writing to commend the Associated Press (AP) for its responsiveness yesterday, 17 August, regarding correcting language used in a wire story.

Early on 17 August AP posted a story that began this way:

*Man Says He Drugged, Had Sex With Ramsey, By Associated Press
BANGKOK, Thailand - The American suspect in the killing of JonBenet Ramsey told investigators that he drugged and had sex with the 6-year-old beauty queen before accidentally killing her, a senior Thai police officer said Thursday.*

From: <http://www.comcast.net/news/index.jsp?cat=GENERAL&fn=/2006/08/17/457550.html>

I contacted the AP office in Portland Oregon to raise serious concern about the inappropriate language in the story as initially posted. Grown men may rape or sexually assault children; they do not have "sex with" 6-year old children. I explained to Tim Fought in the Portland AP office that such language is not only inappropriate, but demonstrably harmful. In my laboratory (<http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/>) at the University of Oregon we investigate many aspects of child abuse including the acceptance of child abuse myths which serve to perpetuate the problem. We and others have found the acceptance of harmful myths are in part a function of the language used by the media.

Tim Fought of the Portland Oregon APoffice was very polite and responsive. He promised to contact the central AP office. A few hours later Mr. Fought called me back to report the language had been changed on the AP wire story.

I was deeply grateful that the AP responded so quickly and responsibly. It is understandable that language gets used sometimes without a full awareness of the implications. We must remain vigilant. As long as child sexual abuse is described as "having sex," this behavior is being implicitly minimized and excused. It is my hope that AP will continue to monitor the language use in this and other cases of child sexual abuse.

Thank you again for your responsiveness.

Sincerely,

Jennifer J. Freyd, Ph.D.
Professor

Cc: Associated Press, Portland Bureau