



## **BBC uses language to minimise offence...again.**

The BBC's online news website yet again reduces a man's abuse of a woman by applying poorly chosen vocabulary to describe a convicted criminal's offensive behaviour. 'Andrew Palfrey's suspended sentence for sex-threat texts' is the ascribed headline to a case where justice has failed to be served and threats depicting sexual violence and violence to a woman's person, have been made. Reasons for making these threats were not clear within the body of the article, but this appears to be from the lack of credible explanation offered in court and not the poor copy of the report.

Andrew Palfrey was given a suspended sentence for sending anonymous texts to his wife's colleague threatening to rape her, force her into prostitution and forcibly inject her with heroin. This is clearly stated within the article. The writer does not veer from this and details the increasingly "sinister and menacing" threats by using isolated quotes to indicate these words are not the journalist's own words, but words uttered in court. Perhaps these words were spoken by the judge in their summing up as they are followed by a direct quote stating these threats were "some of the worst that can be imagined." The judge's words are then repeated and credited to them. It was noted by one reader that perhaps a few synonyms and a conviction in reporting news could have avoided the "unnecessary" use of punctuation.

This also begs the question: why has this article been framed by the term 'sex-threat'? Implications of the word 'sex-threat' could suggest a threat where a woman receives text harassment offering unwanted attention with a view to wearing her down to relinquish to his coercive advances. This is vile, abusive and illegal behaviour warranting a conviction in court and caution from surrounding community. This is not what this man, who is at liberty, has been convicted of. He threatened to rape her. This needs to be identified within the headline and clearly stated. To not do so minimalizes the violence he admitted threatening to inflict on his wife's colleague and subsequent harm he caused. It also negates the poor sentencing given in this case.

The journalist has appeared to have noticed the convicted offender offered an incredulous explanation for his appalling behaviour and ended the article with a reference to the woman's minimal days off at work. Why the news outlet's employee thought it necessary to feed into the ridiculous idea stated in court. Andrew Palfrey was "seeking revenge" "for his wife" and the way his victim was "apparently" treating her at work. Although the reporter indicates indirectly that this explanation has little substance, the fact it is even referred to suggests victim-blaming and that if the victim had been a lazy so and so, his violence may have been justified. A witness to the content of this article sighed deeply as they realised this was a professional writer writing for a National news corporation.

The BBC has form for understating male violence against women. Accusations of a shady past within its corporation amidst the Savile and Stuart Hall scandals would suggest the institute offered more evidence that sexism and patriarchal, old-boy network hierarchy is not wielding the power it once held. The article referred to reveals this is not the case.