

Pedophilia and the media

written by Sandy | January 11, 2023



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By Sandy . . . Which of these would you favor as a husband for your beloved daughter?

The slick fella, too handsome for his own good, whose shifty eyes furtively appraised the family silver or the well-dressed, good-looking young man whose frank curiosity about the family heirlooms showed an appreciation for life's finer things.

Why?

Word choice makes all the difference. Some words are so emotionally laden with either positive or negative connotations that just using them automatically produces the corresponding emotion in the reader or hearer. Producers of media know this and often choose emotionally loaded language to sway the readers to their way of thinking. This is fine for editorials and opinion pieces, but the purveyors of news pieces bear the responsibility of using neutral language, of presenting the facts, the "plain, unvarnished truth," and

allowing readers to form their own conclusions.

These are the facts about the term pedophilia. It is a medical term, not a legal one. There are no laws or statutes criminalizing pedophilia. Depression might cause a person to shoplift, but the criminal act is shoplifting, not having depression. Not everyone who shoplifts has depression, and not all with depression shoplift.

The same is true with pedophilia. Not everyone who molests a child has pedophilia – in fact, research suggests the percentage is low – and not everyone with pedophilia has engaged in any criminal conduct, including molesting a child. And certainly, not all registrants are pedophiles. Sexual convictions run the gamut from public exposure to violent rape.

Recently a series of news stories were published in Joliet, Illinois, by Joliet's ***Patch Publications***. The situation is one where the mayor is doing his best – or worst – to close down an apartment building designed as reentry housing for men with sexual crime convictions. [After losing round one](#) by way of a federal ruling, Mayor Bob O'Dekirk launched round two: the city bought a lot with a vacant house a block away from the [NewDay Apartments](#), the home of the registrants and one of [NARSOL's many partners](#) in implementing fact-driven policies that advance meaningful criminal justice reform.

The mayor's plan, unanimously approved by city council without a grandfather clause, is to demolish the home and create a park/playground there. Projected to be functional by June 2023, the park would place the residents of the apartment building [out of compliance with state law](#) and effectually, the mayor hopes, put the apartments out of business. Called a "pocket park," Joliet is [not the first city to resort to this strategy](#) in order to make areas uninhabitable for registered individuals.

Joliet Patch, the local news homepage for the town on Patch.com has published four articles about the situation in Joliet, three since city hall got involved. Those three all scream, in huge headers, about the “Pedophile Palace” that the mayor has sworn to shut down.

Of all words in our language designed to evoke a strong, visceral, negative reaction, that one ranks right at the top. Seldom fully understood, almost always misused, and often misspelled, pedophilia requires a qualified physician’s diagnosis before one can accurately be labeled a pedophile.

Patch is not the only media outlet to choose and misuse that word to steer readers and listeners toward a specific reaction. Some weeks prior to the most recent article in Joliet, in a recent broadcast of Tucker Carlson, Fox News, in bold headlines, announced, “[TUCKER CARLSON: No healthy society can tolerate pedophilia](#),” with a sub-heading of “Tucker speaks out against child sexual abuse.” The connection is made: Pedophilia and child sexual abuse are interchangeable terms.

[In another video](#), Carlson bemoans the fact that California is “Putting thousands of pedophiles back on the street.” He is speaking of individuals who have been convicted of a sexual crime, have completed the court-ordered incarceration period, and are released under community supervision for the remainder of the sentence.

Once again, the connection between the word and the crime is inescapable, and now not only is child sexual abuse the same as pedophilia, but also everyone on the registry for any sexual crime is a pedophile.

But it is a false connection.

Carlson and Fox News ignore the facts and do everything possible to cement the false connection and establish a belief in the viewers’ minds that precludes any reasonable and factual discussion about sexual offending.

Throughout the Joliet pieces, other pejorative language is used. The apartment dwellers are “sexual predators” at every possible occasion, not “men,” not “tenants,” but “sexual predators.”

Tucker continues to use “pedophile/pedophilia” as often as possible, but at least his rhetoric is labeled “opinion.”

I reached out to **Joliet Patch** and to Tucker Carlson’s team while working on this piece but have not heard back.

Words shape our beliefs, opinions, and actions. They also shape the beliefs, opinions and actions of our lawmakers, and inaccurate words and words whose meanings have been twisted will lead to laws and policies that are inaccurate and twisted. Laws that are based on falsehoods and incorrect beliefs do not advance public safety.

Legislation grounded in empirical evidence and arrived at in the cold, impassionate light of accurate and connotation-free verbiage has the very best chance of providing society with laws that are fair, just, and work as they should.