AIDS Activists React to Press Coverage of Online HIV Hoax

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HIV activists and media experts are criticizing the coverage of an online hoax in which an allegedly HIV-positive woman claimed in a video to have intentionally transmitted the virus to more than 500 people, *The Michigan Messenger* reports. The woman, Jackie Braxton of Detroit, is actually HIV negative and was not charged for the hoax.

Bonnie Bucqueroux, retired director of the Victims and the Media Program at Michigan State University's School of Journalism, questioned the media's response to the YouTube video, which appeared January 14 on mediatakeout.com.

"The story…raises serious concerns about the mainstream media," Bucqueroux said. "Their role as gatekeeper, vetting the facts before publication, is called into serious question in this case. Where are the comments from AIDS experts? Why is this published before we know the facts? There were plenty of red flags in the video that should have raised questions about its authenticity."

Activists say the video and the subsequent media reaction created unnecessary panic.

"Jackie's claims should have been immediately suspect to anyone with even a passing knowledge of HIV and syphilis," said Don Sousie of the Michigan Positive Action Coalition. "Instead, her outrageous claims were taken at face value, with no critical questioning at all. This kind of media coverage is dangerous because it paints those of us with HIV as monsters bent on spreading the virus, without care or concern for others. This is yet another example of fear mongering surrounding HIV."

Braxton told police she created the online video to raise AIDS awareness.

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