

Interviews with journalists can seem daunting—but new research shows 80% of subjects report a positive experience

March 2 2023, by Kathryn Shine



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

"Every journalist who is not too stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible. He is a kind of confidence man, preying on people's vanity, ignorance, or loneliness, gaining their trust, and betraying them without remorse."

So begins Janet Malcolm's renowned book, [The Journalist and the Murderer](#). It was written more than 30 years ago, yet this negative notion has endured.

Journalists are still frequently condemned for how they interact with the people they interview. Indeed, with the advent of televised press conferences, journalists are facing more scrutiny and criticism than ever about their interviewing techniques.

It's a perception that's rarely challenged, even by journalists. But our [new research](#) suggests giving news interviews is generally a positive experience.

What we found

With colleagues from the Global Institute for Women's Leadership at ANU, we surveyed 220 Australian adults who had given news interviews or who have the potential to do so.

Some were subject experts. Others were spokespeople for organizations or communities. We asked them about their willingness to speak to the news media and what may influence that decision. We also asked open-ended questions about what makes for a positive or negative interview.

More than 80% of participants reported their overall experience of giving news interviews was positive. Only 6% reported an overall negative experience. A female university expert said

"I've had a really positive experience with news media, which is not something I would have expected as someone who is actually quite shy and introverted."

And a male community spokesperson said, "Ninety-nine percent of my

media experiences have been very positive and rewarding."

While most people also reported some issues such as rude journalists or rushed interviews, these tended to be the exception rather than the norm.

There's little research about the attitudes of "sources" or "talents" who are approached by journalists to provide news interviews. Most of it has focused on people who frequently engage with the media, such as politicians.

The limited other research that considers [subject experts](#) and "[ordinary people](#)" who engage with the news media aligns with our findings. Even though they may have found inaccuracies in the reporting, the sources considered the overall experience to be positive and beneficial.

Women are just as willing

When I [interviewed 30 female academics](#) about their attitudes towards engaging with the media a few years ago, 90% described their overall experience as positive. All but one said they were willing to give news interviews.

This finding was replicated in our new research. More than 80% of people surveyed were willing to give news interviews. Women were just as willing as men.

This is significant because numerous studies from around the world have found [news coverage](#) is dominated by the voices of men. Around [75% of people quoted, heard or seen in the news are men](#), according to research by the Global Media Monitoring Project.

Some argue this is because women are less willing to do media interviews. Our research refutes this argument, but it does highlight

some notable gender differences in experiences and attitudes.

Women reported significantly lower confidence than men. Only 5% were "very confident", compared to 20% of men. Women were more likely to refuse an interview request due to concerns about their appearance, a perceived lack of expertise, and fear of online harassment.

Concerns about online harassment were legitimate, with 38% of participants saying they had experienced trolling in response to giving a media interview. Men and women were both targeted, but women were more likely to receive sexist abuse.

Generally a valuable experience

Despite these issues and reservations, the participants were generally willing to speak to the media, which makes sense—people usually welcome the opportunity to talk about their area of expertise or share their experience. Inclusion in the news signals credibility and authority. Yes, there are risks to speaking out, but there are significant benefits too.

And there are certain ways journalists can approach a prospective source and carry out interviews to make them feel more comfortable and confident. Our research outlines some of these strategies and techniques, based on feedback from our participants. For example, when you approach a source for an interview:

- be clear about what you are seeking from the source and why you want to speak to them
- demonstrate that you've done your research
- provide a quick run-through of what to expect

- be courteous and flexible regarding timing
- and provide a few questions beforehand.

I'm looking forward to sharing these findings with my journalism students, who tend to believe that asking someone to give an interview is always a major imposition. This research is good news for established journalists too, who rarely get direct feedback about the interview experience.

But perhaps more importantly, it's encouraging for people who engage with the media or have the potential to do so. The way [journalists](#) interact with politicians (who, they would argue, typically avoid answering questions) during press conferences is not reflective of the usual [interview](#) experience.

It might be intimidating to speak to the [news media](#) but our research suggests it's generally a good and valuable experience.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Interviews with journalists can seem daunting—but new research shows 80% of subjects report a positive experience (2023, March 2) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-03-journalists-dauntingbut-subjects-positive.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.