



Women's Declaration International

WDI USA's Principles on Interacting with the Media

[Note: Reading This Document Does Not Authorize Anyone to Speak to the Media on behalf of WDI USA!]

The purpose of this guide is to serve as a starting point for women who want to engage with news media on behalf of women and girls and to advocate for our sex-based rights, as well as as a refresher for women who have already been through the media training program. **If you're hoping to speak on behalf of WDI USA, please note that having read this guide is not sufficient.** Everyone who speaks on behalf of the organization must go through a multi-session media training. Additionally, before each media appearance, she must get Board approval and attend a prep session specific to that media appearance.

Why so much fuss?

The media is not fair to women, and especially to women who dare to talk about women's sex-based rights. In order to accurately portray our position, it's important that we - WDI USA and the movement more generally - be very careful, deliberate, and precise with our messaging. A bad media appearance can sway public opinion to the other side and even tank a small organization like ours.

Types of media

As a WDI USA trained media spokeswoman, there are many types of media you might be engaging with. The broad distinction is between written/print media, and audio/visual media. Written media of your own creation might include your own op-eds or letters to the editor. You might also be interviewed in order to include a quote in a written article. Audio/visual media would include local live radio stations, long-form podcasts, video interviews at events (ex. rallies), and national TV. A different type of media means a different preparatory process, priorities, strategies, et cetera.

Logistical concerns

How do you prepare for an interview when it comes to logistical concerns? It all depends on the format of your interview. If you're calling in over Zoom or another video platform, you'll want to make sure that your background looks professional. It doesn't necessarily need to be beautiful, but it should be neat, with your camera centered on the background and no visible distractions. Be mindful of lighting that either shadows you or, alternatively, washes you out. It's good to make sure the most powerful light source in the room is *in front of your camera, not behind you*. Humans get a lot of information through reading others' facial expressions, and lighting or other factors that make it more difficult to read your face make you seem less personable. If your internet is unstable, consider using ethernet for the interview. If you have concerns about your

background, lighting, soundproofing, or internet, know that it may be possible to rent small studio rooms short-term. Check in advance for availability and booking requirements.

Physical mannerisms and appearance

Be sure to make eye contact with the camera, if you're being interviewed remotely, or the interviewer if it's in person, unless instructed otherwise. Many people have a tendency to look upward and sideways when thinking - refrain from doing so to the extent possible. Avoid fidgeting or touching your face. Limit gestures. Avoid hunching - it makes you look small and unsure. Instead, keep your back straight and your shoulders broad and relaxed. Smile when it's appropriate to do so - smiling makes people read you as open and friendly, and viewers/listeners are more likely to listen to what you have to say. Even on radio - it comes through in your voice. Of course, there are many cases where it would be inappropriate to smile, such as when discussing the issue of women in prison being raped by men, so use your discretion. Be sure to look professional when it comes to hair, dress and makeup; if you wish to wear makeup for a video interview, please keep it to a minimum. Above all, strive to appear calm, knowledgeable, and dignified.

Verbal mannerisms

Avoid using filler words like "um" and "like". "So" and "well" are also better avoided. There's nothing wrong with taking a moment to think instead of using filler words - it makes you seem thoughtful and serious. Avoid using the word "we", because it's often unclear what category is being encompassed by it. The organization WDI USA? Feminists? Women? You and your friend? Instead, directly name the group to which you're referring. Similarly, avoid using phrases like "WDI USA believes" or "I think". Phrasing your statements as just an opinion makes it easier to dismiss them. Phrases like "WDI USA acknowledges the biological reality of sex" make it clear that this is a recognition of reality, not a personal viewpoint.

Style guide

Be sure to read (or re-read) [WDI USA's Journalism Style Manual](#). The short version is that it's important to use reality-based language, rather than speaking in ways that undermine our message and suggest it's possible for humans to change sex. For example, "gender identity" is a nebulous, homophobic, and poorly defined concept. Use air quotes or say "so-called gender identity" to make it clear that you have a critical view. Avoid using words like "transwomen" entirely. Instead, say what you mean - men. In fact, WDI USA advises women to stop even thinking in terms of "transwomen" or "transgender women"; scrubbing such terminology from your mind will help you avoid accidentally slipping and using it during an interview (it's also quite liberating to scrub our minds of the language of the oppressor!).

Content

As a trained WDI USA spokeswoman, no matter which issue you're discussing - reproductive freedom, women's free speech, harm to minors, women in prison, and so on - organize your thoughts into three points. These are the three points that you'll be getting across to the audience. It's tempting to share lots of information and lots of angles, but it's easy to overwhelm unfamiliar audiences. Instead, bring everything back to your three main points.

Questions you should always be able to answer

What is your organization? Who are you as a person? What is your role in the organization? Why do you care about this issue? Explain this situation to us - what is happening here? How did we get here / why is this happening? Where are all the feminists? What can people do to take action? Do you have any final thoughts you'd like to share with our viewers?

Miscellaneous notes

Here are a few things other women have suggested in the media training sessions: Find some little snappy, positive soundbites. Here are some examples of soundbites you can always rely on if you feel caught or unsure of yourself:

- There is *nothing* progressive about denying the material reality of sex.
- Men are male and women are female; it's not complicated.
- Feminists fight for the rights of women and girls, including lesbians, as a sex class.

Think about the 'why is this happening' question in advance - it can be pretty tricky. Learn and say the names of the women who are being displaced.

Strategic thinking

When being interviewed as a WDI USA spokeswoman, it's a good idea to record the interview yourself to prevent misquoting - just make sure the reporter knows you're doing it. Avoid saying things that could be taken out of context or easily misinterpreted. If you're accused of something, don't outright deny the accusation - that sounds defensive. Instead, take another angle or turn the question back on them. Be very careful about recorded on-the-record interviews with hostile outlets. Hostile media outlets are likely to edit in ways that make us look bad. Always clarify whether you are on background or on the record, in advance and throughout the interview. If you're in the middle of an interview and want to say something on background, say so and get the interviewer's agreement; then be explicit when you're going back on the record. If you want what you're saying to be on background only, you need the reporter to agree to that by saying so explicitly. Ethical reporters will honor this.

