

How to get a positive image into a hostile media: student demo 2

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Girl and van

Perhaps it's not a surprise that some of today's newspapers have gone with pictures of schoolgirls on their front pages and online. Though most have still gone for the macho shot of hooded youths smashing up a police van.

Last time they all went for [one violent image](#) which was itself rather staged. Some people were very angry at [what they saw as blatant media distortion](#). But as [I pointed out at the time](#), the different papers had nuanced narratives of the actual demonstration.

This time a few of the picture editors (including the Telegraph, Mail and Metro in various editions) gave prominence to the much more interesting picture (one version above left) which told the story of how most of the students on the march wanted a peaceful process. The vast majority were aware that violence would misrepresent their cause.

You can tell from the [video on this website](#) that the silly few boys who decided to wreck the van did so because they were over-excited and a little short on political consciousness. (Although as this [Mail Online coverage shows](#), women are perfectly capable of a spot of aggression against innocent police vehicles).



Boy and van

The thoughtful and practical way those young women intervened reminded me of similar actions by young people protesting against knife-crime and media portrayal of their communities.

But let's be honest, national newspapers do love a nice picture of female 6th formers. You only have to see the [pro-girl bias](#) of photographic coverage of A Level Result Day.

I was also impressed by the [BBC's Nick Robinson's](#) coverage on the Ten O'Clock News which treated the young (mainly school) students with respect and allowed them to speak for themselves.

Of course student politics is always a bit silly. Of course young people are not as sophisticated and articulate as more experienced citizens. But that's the point of being a student – to experiment, to express yourself and to learn and develop.

Regardless of their political views and the actual issue of university finance, I thought that the vast majority on the demo yesterday were a credit to their schools, colleges and themselves. And they showed that it is possible to get a positive message over despite the limitations of mainstream media.

[There is an interesting conspiracy theory circulating about the van – was it a decoy or #baitvan as it's called on Twitter? A good place to go for discussion of that [is this blog](#).]

[Declaration of interest: I am not saying all this just because my 15 year-old was there! ;)]

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