

Don't believe Hollywood's sexual fantasies about female journalists

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In the movies, we jump into bed with practically every interviewee. Strange how the men don't get that treatment

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A couple of years ago, my editor told me to interview a well-known actor. I mentioned this to a friend, and he smirked knowingly. "Better cancel your evening plans. I know at least three female journalists who slept with him after interviewing him," he said. "Well, I don't know them, but I've heard the stories."

I rolled my eyes. "Oh the *stories*. Well, that sounds totally credible. Anyway, it's never even occurred to me to sleep with an interviewee," I said.

"Really?" he said, amazed.

I was now more intrigued by his amazement at my failure to shag on the job than the prospect of a celebrity trying to seduce me. Was this yet another part of journalism I'd somehow missed out on, like learning shorthand? No, of course not. (Seriously, have you seen most journalists? No one's trying to sleep with us - as a demographic, we're a riposte to Darwinism.) But I eventually understood my friend's amazement: among all the lessons to be gleaned from Hollywood movies, there are few that have become as established as the idea that female journalists have sex with the people they're writing about.

Judd Apatow's comedy *Trainwreck*, which stars and is written by Amy Schumer, will come to the UK next month. Despite its pretence to edginess, it is utterly conventional, not least in its depiction of - can you guess? - female journalists. The movie tells the story of Amy, a journalist who is assigned by her editor to write a profile of a sexy sports doctor. (All sports doctors are sexy - this, too, is an ironclad truth in pop culture.) So off she goes and promptly gets drunk with the doctor - and has sex with him - because how else do female journalists get to know their subjects?

In 1940's *His Girl Friday*, Hildy Johnson was so engrossed in her work, she didn't even notice the romantic machinations around her masterminded by her ex-husband - and he

was played by Cary Grant, for heaven's sake. Now, the idea that female journalists work by spreading their legs has become so established, it is damn near a trope.

Whereas male journalists in movies work by using their malicious minds (Kirk Douglas in *Ace in the Hole*, Jake Gyllenhaal in *Nightcrawler*) or unimpeachable morality (Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman in *All the President's Men*, George Clooney and David Strathairn in *Good Night and Good Luck*), their female counterparts use a part of their anatomy that has nothing to do with their brain. Sometimes they do it to get a story, sometimes it just happens because, well, that's what it's like being a female journalist: you go to the office and, next thing you know, your knickers are around your ankles.

Just off the top of my head, here is a selection of fictional female journalists who sleep their way through their jobs: Chelsea (Rosario Dawson) has sex in a club bathroom with the celebrity actor (Chris Rock) she's profiling in *Top Five*; in *Crazy Heart*, Jean (Maggie Gyllenhaal) rescues an alcoholic country singer (Jeff Bridges) she's interviewing through the redemptive power of her magical vagina (an essential tool for female journalists, along with serious spectacles and an ugly jacket); in *Three Kings*, Cathy (Judy Greer) trades sex for stories with Clooney - which, to be fair, is an experience all female journalists have had; in the excellent *Nightcrawler*, TV news editor Nina (Rene Russo) sleeps with a creepy journalist (Jake Gyllenhaal) in order to maintain his loyalty; Veronica Corningstone (Christina Applegate) swiftly ends up in bed with Ron Burgundy (Will Ferrell) in *Anchorman*; Susan Orlean (Meryl Streep) ends up having sex with, if memory serves, just about everyone in *Adaptation*, which must have come as a surprise to the real-life Orlean, a respected journalist; poor TV producer Jane (Holly Hunter) tries her best to sleep with airheaded anchor Tom (William Hurt) in *Broadcast News*, but life keeps thwarting them. Even Lois Lane fell for Superman, after all.

Then there are the female journalists who are specifically assigned to manipulate or sleep with men, in such films as *How To Lose a Guy in 10 Days* and the TV adaptation of *Sex and the City*, in which Carrie Bradshaw's entire beat is her bedroom, even though that was certainly not the case in the original columns by Candace Bushnell.

Occasionally, the depiction of the women journalists in movies is tied to their source material, which proves just how deep-rooted this cliché is, beloved beyond Hollywood studios. In *Thank You for Smoking*, Washington journalist Heather (Katie Holmes) maliciously seduces the poor tobacco lobbyist for the sake of a story. Bridget Jones's only news scoop comes thanks to help from Mark Darcy, who she ends up snogging on a street corner. In the utterly tedious *The Devil Wears Prada*, fashion journalist Andy (Anne Hathaway) ends up in bed with a photographer during fashion week, even though I can speak from personal experience that fashion week is so sexless it is essentially a nunnery with more expensive clothes.

And of course, there's *House of Cards*, both UK and US versions, in which a young female journalist engages in kinky sex with a creepy politician for a story. Presumably Lord Sewel had been watching *House of Cards* a little too keenly when he was caught this

week boasting that he had slept with a female BBC journalist. “She was very young and it was very pleasant,” he said, like a cut-price Francis Urquhart. The journalist swiftly denied this nonsense.

To a certain extent, the depiction of female journalists in films reflects how movies in general belittle women who work these days. Women's jobs, today's Hollywood movies imply, are a mere hurdle they need to scale before discovering the meaning of life (marriage). But the Hollywood obsession with female journalists' sex lives feels especially ridiculous as there are few professionals who film folk encounter more than journalists. So this idea that female journalists are all just dying to jump into bed with them is a fascinating insight into certain film-makers' tragic sexual fantasies.

Incidentally, I didn't sleep with the actor - he didn't even make a move on me, thank God. In fact, the only personal interaction we had afterwards was when he called the next week to berate me for misspelling his ex-girlfriend's surname in the paper. Honestly, you could have cut the sexual tension with a knife.

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