

Abstract: The relationship between a female editor and female reporter is depicted as a difficult one in three fictional accounts of fashion journalists.

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May 15, 2011

Hell Hath No Fury Like Two Women in One Room

Robert Frost once said, “Being a boss anywhere is lonely. Being a female boss in a world of mostly men is especially so.” Robert Frost was a poet, not a journalist, but his father was, so perhaps he knew something of the world of journalism. Journalism was a man’s career up until essentially the late 19th century and early 20th century, when women like Nellie Bly came onto the scene and made the first few cracks in the glass ceiling (Lutes 2002). It is only natural that as soon as women had access to reporting, they would soon have access to editing as well. This is where competition and the female dynamic come into play. Women are given many stereotypes, but none seems to be more prevalent than the belief that if one woman is put in charge of another, she will automatically do anything in her power to make the other woman’s life increasingly difficult. This belief is reinforced in the way that the relationship between a female editor and a female reporter is depicted in popular film and television. In three fictional depictions of female fashion writers in New York City, the editor is shown as a tough critic, a woman who shoots down almost anything the reporter brings in and takes up opportunities to belittle her subordinates. She is harsh, unfeeling to the point of being hard. Because of this, the reporter has to rebel against her editor and overcome these setbacks in order to achieve something. In the meantime, it seems that the reporter must

discover something about her editor in order to truly understand herself. In popular culture, the reporter must get a preview of what her life could be like in order to truly succeed.

Women being pitted against each other is not a new concept, especially when it is part of the struggle to prove dominance. The fact that women in power are perceived negatively is an especially sad commentary, seeing as it took women so long to get to a power position in the first place. One of the more telling commentaries of women in power position is that despite being of the same sex, “more people prefer male than female bosses, and it is more difficult for women than men to become leaders and to succeed in male-dominated leadership role” (Eagly 2007). Perhaps this is because men believe that other men are more likely to promote them to positions of power, seeing as “one line of thought suggest that female bosses serve as agents of change for fostering the careers of female subordinates” (Maume 2011). Because there is a tendency for women to be more emotional creatures and more extroverted, some studies say that a woman must take the harshest stance in order to avoid being seen as easily manipulated or malleable to male dominance (Cords 2006). Journalism, due to its demand and time constraints, makes female competition easy to believe, especially in the fashion world. All three of the stories with female editors exist in the world of fashion. Perhaps this is because fashion is seen a woman’s industry: women like clothes, and therefore it would only make sense for them to want to write about them. In the world of fashion, the mentality of doing anything to look good is not uncommon, and therefore it is easy to believe that the female editors would manipulate their reporters in order to fit with the “in” crowd.

Perhaps the most well known “power female” editor, *Vogue*’s senior editor Anna Wintour, became even more famous when she inspired the character for the best-selling book and film, *The Devil Wears Prada*. Andy Sachs, played by Anne Hathaway, is a recent Northwestern graduate who moves to New York to chase her dream of becoming a world-class reporter. Andy is the quintessential ambitious dreamer: she wants to be a writer that actually *does* something. Yet early on in her quest, she discovers that being hired right out of college is not as simple as she initially thought, and therefore on a whim decides to apply for a secretarial position at *Runway*, the nation’s most famous fashion magazine. The editor at *Runway* is Miranda Priestly, who can most accurately be described as an ice queen. She is impeccably dressed, perfectly tailored, and undoubtedly ruthless. Upon interviewing Andy, the first thing she says to her is, “You have no sense of fashion. [...] No, no, that wasn’t a question.” Meryl Streep plays Miranda perfectly: she is mean, she is manipulative, but one almost has a grudging admiration for her “take no prisoners” employment style. Andy starts out at *Runway* detesting it and Miranda for everything they represent; yet soon, she finds herself fitting in with the “in” crowd, even going from a size six to a size four. She even begins to emulate Miranda herself, much to the disdain of her friends and family. Andy seems to have started to believe that in order to survive in the world of the “bitchy boss,” one must become increasingly like her.

Yet Miranda, in fact, is not content, despite all of her power. As Andy finds out by accidentally overhearing a conversation between Miranda and her husband, Miranda’s personal life is in shambles, as often seems to be the case of the female journalist in popular culture. Her husband is leaving her, her children are spoiled, and she cannot seem to balance work and family life. “Miranda invokes second wave feminism, whose

advancements seem to make her more miserable than anyone else in the film” (Love and Helmbrecht 2007). Despite this glimpse into Miranda’s imperfect life, Andy still does not give up her position as personal assistant. She’s become an increasingly important asset to both the magazine and Miranda, and it appears that she enjoys her newfound indispensability. Yet as Andy becomes more secure and her work job, her personal life begins to unravel. Her boyfriend breaks up with her after he notices how much she has changed, telling her, “I wouldn’t care if you were out there pole-dancing all night. Just do it with a little integrity!” She also begins to carry on an affair with a man she knows she is wrong for, but she has become so caught up in the world of glitz and glamour that she cannot seem to remember who she was before. It takes the whole movie, yet Andy eventually figures out the truth: despite her best attempts, she is not meant for the world of fashion, and she “chooses to leave her work, haunted by the fear that she will become Miranda” (Love and Hembrecht 2007).

Andy is the heroine of the book and the film because she chooses happiness over ensured success at *Runway*, but that leaves the reader to ask: why can she not have both? Despite being a story of female empowerment and showing a world in which women can rule, *The Devil Wears Prada* presents that idea that there is too much holding a woman back from being truly happy in an editorial position. The relationship between Andy and Miranda is meant to show that Andy is pure and untainted by the jading of success, yet it also seems to inadvertently suggest that women in positions of power are cruel and a career is damaging. Andy’s quitting *Runway* shows more about her integrity than anything else, but it also leads the viewer to wonder more about what will happen to an aging Miranda. Perhaps this comes in the effectiveness in which Streep plays the

character. “Miranda may endlessly torment Andy, but Streep gives her enough depth that you can-almost-understand and even sympathize with her” (Rozen 2006). Miranda becomes a tragic character, a woman who gave up everything in her personal life in order to have great success in her work life. She achieved everything she wanted, but it came, as what the viewer is to believe, at much too high a price. “Vulnerable underneath her armor of designer clothing and shock of white hair, Miranda encapsulates the complexities of a powerful woman in an industry rooted in artifice” (Entertainment Weekly 2010) As Andy is the protagonist of the film and the one the audience must root for, Miranda’s life seems to be worth letting go of, which is perhaps the flaw of popular culture’s depiction of this relationship: with women, there must always be some sort of sacrifice. An interesting thing to note is that at the end of the movie, where Andy is being interviewed for a job that would seem to make her more content, her prospective editor is male, further enforcing the feeling that women cannot get along when one of the holds more power. Andy’s great triumph in the film comes not in her own professional success, but in overcoming the barriers put in front of her by her editor.

Kate Hudson’s romantic comedy *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* shows the relationship between a female reporter and editor to be not as malicious as that of Miranda and Andy, but still flawed all the same. Like Hathaway, Kate Hudson plays an Andy who also works at a prominent fashion magazine. Where Hathaway’s Andy went from fashion rags to riches, Hudson’s Andy is young and beautiful, and writes a “How To” column for *Composure*, giving female readers advice on everything from clothes to men to life in general. Yet she finds herself increasingly bored with her topics, and begins to ask her editor Lana for room for more creative growth. The viewer is

immediately drawn to Andy much more than to Lana. While Andy is young and vibrant, Lana is middle aged, unaccommodating, and just this side of crazy. The two women are even juxtaposed through hair color: Andy's is a glossy blonde, whereas Lana's is a dark, unwelcoming brown. Not only is Lana less pleasant to look at, she is also shown to be less culturally informed than the women who worked for her. At a morning staff meeting, Lana turns to one of the writers and asks, "Who is that chic Buddhist Richard Gere is always cavorting with?" When the writer replies that it is the Dali Lama, Lana explains in return, "He's fabulous!" Lana's employees are constantly talking about her behind her back, which would seem to undermine her power, yet as editor of the magazine she is still able to control everything that they do, especially what they are allowed to write about.

While the movie focuses less on Andy's work life and more on her budding relationship, it is Lana who inadvertently reveals the secret that ends that very relationship. The relationship that Andy is in is actually not a legitimate relationship; Andy has been assigned an article writing about how to "lose" a guy. She has to do everything wrong with the man: be clingy, call too often, talk about marriage, the whole nine yards. The problem with the guy, however, is that he turns out to have a secret of his own, and through both their trickery, they end up falling for each other. As soon as Andy discovers that she is in love with her subject, she begs Lana to let her write on something else. Lana, however, has tunnel vision, and refuses to let Andy give up such a big story. As Andy finds herself liking the guy more and more and Lana refuses to let her give up the story, "this epiphany is likely to entail the repudiation of the value system of an older professional female and the recognition that professional ambition is a blind

alley” (Negra 2008). It is a romantic comedy, one not meant to provoke any deep thoughts, yet *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* provides a significant amount of social commentary on women in the workforce. When Andy turns in what she believes to be her best article yet, about the relationship that Lana helped destroy, Lana agrees with her, saying, “This shows me you’re ready to be unleashed. From now on, feel free to write about anything.” Yet when Andy offers to write a more poignant piece on politics, Lana shoots down that idea, telling her instead to write on “shoes, laser therapy, dressing for your body type. Use your imagination.” Andy then realizes that she and Lana will never see eye-to-eye on what is truly important, and she quits the magazine. Of course, as this is a romantic comedy, she eventually ends up with the guy and a great job, but it is the fact that she had to quit her initial one that again emphasizes filmmakers’ belief that it is virtually impossible for a female editor and a female reporter to agree. Like the first Andy, in order for this Andy to have a successful career, she must rid herself of the formidable presence of her current editor, and instead find one that better suits her abilities. As in *The Devil Wears Prada*, the reader is left to assume that the female editor will not be as successful without her reporter counterpart. One must note that in most cases, editors were once journalists themselves, so do female editors just let the power go to their heads and forget what it was like to be a journalist? The fashion industry, in film and in reality, is often seen as a competitive world full of competition of egos, so perhaps this personality is limited to the subject of fashion. Yet this would be hard to debate because the majority of the films and television shows made with female editors are set at a fashion magazine.

One of the more beloved fictional female journalists, or at least columnists, is Sarah Jessica Parker's character in *Sex and the City*, Carrie Bradshaw. A woman whose career is to write for other women, Carrie is the everywoman: she is over thirty, single, and mostly just trying to hold it together. Her career allows her articles to provide the narration for the show. As Parker's voice flows over the scenes, she is shown mostly at her computer, typing away about the question of life. Throughout the first three seasons Carrie writes for a third rate New York newspaper, the fictitious *New York Star*. In season four, however, in the episode "A Vogue Idea" she is soon given the opportunity of a lifetime: writing for *Vogue*. As *Vogue* is the pinnacle of fashion magazines, the offer to write for them is once in a lifetime. Carrie is more than thrilled and she cannot wait to show off her piece, until she meets editor Enid Frick, played by Candice Bergen. As she ages, though quite gracefully, Bergen is often typecast as the intimidating older woman, such as in *Sweet Home Alabama* and *Miss Congeniality*. She is shown as the same thing here: a power player, "the epitome of frosty WASP perfection" (Hepola 2003). Enid rips Carrie's first piece apart, giving it back to her covered in red ink marks and says to her, quite simply, "This isn't *Vogue*." Just the way in which the two women are dressed says much about their characters. Enid has on designer reading glasses, a cashmere sweater, a diamond pin, and perfectly coiffed hair. Carrie, on the other hand, is dressed in a fashion-forward jean suit with unruly curls and her signature gold necklace. It is immediately shown that these women have little in common other than their love for (differing) fashion. Carrie is stunned at Enid's cold rejection of her piece; she stares at it sadly, and says, with a slight degree of humor, "There it was: the article I put my heart and soul into, and it was bleeding." Julian, Enid's male counterpart, tries to soften the

blow to Carrie's ego by telling her it was a nice first draft, but Enid will not have any of this. She says to Julian, with Carrie sitting a foot away, "I'm not sure she knows anything about accessories, or, for that matter, men. [...] We're not looking for *Vogue* according to your agenda. No one cares about your agenda." Enid is harsh, with little to no regard for Carrie's feelings. Julian is shown to be more conscious of the emotions of the writer, but he is shown to be a louse later in the episode when he hits in Carrie, despite being married. Julian's actions make Enid look more appealing as an editor, because she is at least honest. Yet despite all her tough exterior, Enid turns out to be what Carrie, like Andy in *The Devil Wears Prada*, really does not wish to become: aging and single.

Carrie continues to have a tepid relationship with Enid, writing pieces for *Vogue* sporadically. She fears, and somewhat respects, Enid for being a tough editor, despite the fact that she has a tendency to make Carrie's life increasingly complicated. Soon, however, Carrie discovers that Enid is perfect. At a dinner function, Enid suddenly shows her true colors, becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the situation. "When Ms. Bergen's character saw her man with another (younger) woman, she unraveled, hiding behind the guests, yelling at the hostess, slithering out the exit -- in short, humiliating herself" (Hepola 2003). The powerful woman is reduced to a scared girl, showing Carrie further about what her life would be like if she is not careful. The moment is meant to serve as a warning to Carrie, but it, like Miranda's breakdown in *The Devil Wears Prada*, emphasizes that women in power lead catastrophic personal lives. Carrie's love life, as most of the viewers of *Sex and the City* know, has been anything but perfect. Unlike Enid, however, she is actively dating, running her own personal life, and

has the advantage of being younger. In all three of these depictions of the battle between the female reporter and the female editor, age plays into the plot as a double-edged sword that both parties tend to wield.

Later in the fourth season, when Carrie turns in her most recent article, Enid once again puts her in an awkward position by asking if Carrie would set her up with someone for a dinner party that she is throwing later in the week. She is more than embarrassed to ask Carrie for help, mumbling, “I can’t believe I’m about to ask this. Does he [Carrie’s new boyfriend] have a single friend that you could bring along for me?” Carrie has been dating a Russian painter who is far closer to Enid’s age than her own, something that causes quite the conflict between the two. When Carrie protests that she is unsure if Alexandr will be comfortable with setting someone up, Enid looks at her and says, “Carrie, I got you a job. You get me a man.” Because of the level of affluence at which Alexandr, Carrie’s boyfriend, operates, it is assumed that Enid believes all his friends would be attractive and wealthy. Carrie, however, sets Enid up with a food critic, who, while being perfectly lovely, is short and balding. This little arrangement could almost be seen as spiteful of Carrie, taking a jab at the personal life of the editor who has made Carrie’s professional life so complicated. Enid, unsurprisingly, is repulsed by the physical appearance of her new date, telling Carrie, “He’s a hobbit!” While Carrie does her best to try and make sure Enid’s date is comfortable, she returns to the main area of the living room and discovers that instead of being worried about where her own date is, Enid has spent the majority of the party flirting with Carrie’s boyfriend. Carrie confronts Enid about what she is doing, and Enid replies to Carrie defensively, “It’s not fair. He’s my age and you’ve got him and I’m in no man’s land. Literally. I have no man

anywhere.” Enid continues to lament how men can date any woman at any age, but few are attracted to successful women who are somewhat older. While this scene shows Enid’s vulnerability, it still makes her look like an unfortunate character because she would stoop to the level of trying to steal Carrie’s boyfriend in the first place.

Perhaps the negative portrayal of Enid can be associated with the fact that Candice Bushnell, whose books the television show is based on, broke up with *Vogue* publisher Ron Gallotti (Schwartzbaum 1996). Allowing for Bergen to play the editor, and to be a woman, enabled the competitive side of female relations to be shown, and gave Carrie somewhat of a “frenemy” to fight with. Bergen’s character, like the previous two female editors, should only have influence over Carrie’s writing career, yet her presence is constantly felt in Carrie’s personal life as well. There is the lingering feeling that Enid is not only Carrie’s editor, but also a glimpse at what her life could look like if she is not careful. For a television show that prides itself to be about “female heterosexuality and empowerment” (Genz 2010), it is interesting to note that despite doing a favor for her editor, Carrie does not like her as a person, and more than anything, as Enid represents her greatest fear: growing to be old and single. *Sex and the City* was so influential a show that it even sparked a voter movement. In the 2004 presidential election, there was deemed a “Sex and the City voter”, an independent woman that “offers an important case study of third-wave feminist logic as it was appropriated and infused in campaign discourse and political journalism” (Anderson and Stewart 2004). If *Sex and the City* is popular enough to spark a political movement, then one is able to assume that it can influence the way that women perceive other women, especially those in power.

In all three of these popular culture works, the relationship between the female editor and the female reporter is a tempestuous one. Yet despite all of their differences, it seems that the battle that wages between the two is what encourages the female reporter to go out and chase her dreams, so to speak. In order to truly triumph, the younger woman must face down her fear of becoming like the older and change her life path in order to do so. One of the drawbacks, however, of this mentality is that it inadvertently claims that women cannot get along with one another in power, and that if the sacrifice will end up being either professional or personal, because she cannot have both. The Mirandas, Lanas, and Enids of the world have chosen their professional life over their personal life, and though with age comes success, happiness does not directly follow. Both Andys and Carrie must try and find their own path, but the fact that they must stray so far from the previous one is a sad commentary on the role of women in power, and the relationship that members of the gender have with one another. It seems that the view of female bosses still has a long way to go, as does the perception of the way women interact with one another. Where men use fists, women use words, breaking down the lesser until she has no choice but to become more like her more her stronger version. Yet despite the stronger version—the editor—wielding a great deal of power, she does not have any real happiness. The reporter must triumph over her editor, and the editor always seems to lose out in the end.

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