

Casting: Plucky, intrepid female reporter for major motion picture



by [Julie Moos](#) Published Oct. 12, 2011 4:08 pm

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Kay Steiger is tired of movie characters like The New York Times reporter played by Marisa Tomei in the political thriller “Ides of March.” Tomei, who also played reporters in “The Paper” and “War Inc.,” said she [didn't do much prep work for this film](#). Nor did the script require her to, according to Steiger.

Tomei's character is part of an increasing archetype in modern film — particularly thrillers and political dramas: the plucky/intrepid female reporter/blogger. While this archetype was typically fulfilled in the past by a balding, middle-aged, overweight, sloppy white guy, it is a role that is becoming increasingly modernized through better fashion, more technology, and, yes, the presence of women in the newsroom.

Here's how Steiger describes the archetypal female reporter:

- They flirt with male sources to get information.
- They're usually depicted as “bloggers,” sometimes with a joke about how blogging isn't real journalism thrown in.
- They tend to focus on the scandalous.
- They're usually white.

[One commenter pointed out](#) that while comic books may have their issues, “they've been putting competent women in the news room for 70 years now!” starting with Lois Lane.

“Ides of March” is directed by George Clooney, who also directed “Good Night, and Good Luck” about Edward R. Murrow. Clooney's father was a TV anchor.

Characteristics Of The Intrepid Female Reporter

By Kay Steiger on Oct 11, 2011 at 5:48 pm



This weekend *Ides of March*, the George Clooney-directed political drama based on the Beau Willimon play *Farragut North*, opened across the country. Lots of folks says feminist pinup boy Ryan Gosling delivers an excellent performance — and I agree, but I want to focus this post on Marisa Tomei’s character — or should I say archetype — in the film. Tomei, in a departure from her usual aging stripper role, plays a New York Times reporter named Ida Horowicz.

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In other words, female journalists can breathe a sigh of relief that they’re no longer relegated to portrayals of ladymag journalists in which they use their own love lives as writing material a la Kate Hudson in *10 Things I Hate About You*. While it’s great to see serious political reporters increasingly played by women, writers of these scripts seem to fall all too often seem to sub in some of the same basic characteristics over and over again.

They flirt with male sources to get information. Tomei, in *Ides of March*, alternates telling Gosling she “loves him” and “hates him” depending on what information she gets out of him. Later, Philip Seymour Hoffman’s character Paul universalizes this love/hate media relationship, but it’s hard to deny that Tomei plays this off as a flirtatious scene. I think lots of female reporters find this pattern a bit, um, irritating. After all, throwing in the flirting sends a message that female reporters can’t cover a serious beat without using sex appeal to get the information. I’m not going to say it never happens, but I’d like to think that all those female journalists didn’t rely on flirting for every big story. And why don’t female journalists ever call up female sources in on television or in film?

They're usually depicted as "bloggers," sometimes with a joke about how blogging isn't real journalism thrown in. This was, perhaps, one of the most-discussed aspects of the American adaptation of *State of Play*. (Alyssa herself [wrote about it](#) back when the film first came out for the *Atlantic*.) Rachel McAdams was depicted as a blogger/reporter Della Frye for the paper, which was deemed lower on the totem pole than grizzled reporter Cal McCaffrey (Russell Crowe). And let's face it: McAdams' character was sometimes portrayed as naïve at best, incompetent at worst. Crowe's character threw in plenty of snide comments about blogging as somehow separate from journalism, which, for a film released in 2009, just felt dated.

They tend to focus on the scandalous. It's hard to shake the reporter, Petra Moritz (Lily Rabe), in last season's *The Good Wife* as she hunted down the truth on whether Peter Florrick (Chris North) had had another affair. That [scene](#) depicting the phone call between her and Alicia (Julianna Margulies), as she kept pushing the personal details — "Have you had an AIDS test?" — is downright uncomfortable and makes the Petra character come off as scummy.

They're usually white. Unfortunately, this stereotype is becoming truer and truer as [newsroom diversity drops](#) (it's hard to say if this is true with new media, since online newsrooms rarely fill out the diversity survey). And while the number of female reporters is on the rise, perhaps reflected in the prevalence of the plucky female reporter on television and in film, real-life female reporters usually have male bosses. According to a [Reuters report released this year](#), only 23 percent of top-level management positions are held by women.

So, props to Hollywood for acknowledging that women can be hard-nosed reporter types, but it seems that, sadly, they still need some diversity and character development.