



# **The Good Girls Revolt: How the Women of Newsweek Sued their Bosses and Changed the Workplace**

*Lynn Povich*

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On March 16, 1970, Newsweek magazine hit newsstands with a cover story on the fledgling feminist movement entitled "Women in Revolt." That same day, 46 Newsweek women, Lynn Povich among them, announced they'd filed an EEOC complaint charging their employer with "systematic discrimination" against them in hiring and promotion.

In "The Good Girls Revolt," Povich evocatively tells the story of this dramatic turning point through the lives of several participants, showing how personal experiences and cultural shifts led a group of well-mannered, largely apolitical women, raised in the 1940s and 1950s, to stand up for their rights--and what happened after they did. For many, filing the suit was a radicalizing act that empowered them to "find themselves" and stake a claim. Others lost their way in a landscape of opportunities, pressures, discouragements, and hostilities they weren't prepared to navigate.

With warmth, humor, and perspective, the book also explores why changes in the law did not change everything for today's young women.

## **The Good Girls Revolt: How the Women of Newsweek Sued their Bosses and Changed the Workplace Details**

Date : Published September 10th 2012 by PublicAffairs

ISBN :

Author : Lynn Povich

Format : Kindle Edition 292 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Feminism, History, Autobiography, Memoir



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# From Reader Review The Good Girls Revolt: How the Women of Newsweek Sued their Bosses and Changed the Workplace for online ebook

## Laurie Gold says

My consciousness was raised in 1978, during my first semester at college. Nearly 35 years later, my 20-year-old daughter is about to start her junior year. Like the young professional women Povich writes about as her new book begins, she doesn't consider herself a feminist. Like the bright and shiny-eyed women at the start of her book, my daughter lacks the contextual history of sexism and the knowledge of who fought the good fight for equality. I would love for her to read this book.

Povich uses the experiences of those modern young women as entrée to far more personal experiences. The author was one of nearly four dozen women employed by Newsweek magazine to file an EEOC complaint charging their employee with systemic discrimination. Women were hired as researchers (AKA fact checkers), but rarely as reporters, even less often as writers, and certainly never as editors. Many of these women actually did the work of reporters and/or writers, but were not paid for it, and even the women who did that work were not considered when those positions opened up. Ironically, even the landmark Newsweek cover article, "Women in Revolt," was written by an outsider, the wife of one of the men on staff.

Why were women ghettoized? Why weren't they considered for "men's" work or paid more? Because it simply wasn't done. Or so one of the magazine's editors admitted at the time, not even realizing how ridiculous a statement it was...and remains.

The author, along with the others involved in the action, was a "good girl," an apolitical woman who almost reluctantly became involved in a fight that helped open up journalism to women. These women were not bra-burning, flame-throwing "feminazis." But they realized after training men to become their bosses that something had to be done. And so they did it.

Interestingly, though their experience was groundbreaking, few even in the industry know about their efforts today. The young women Povich writes about at the start of her book work[ed] at Newsweek in the late 2000s, and after experiencing some of the same systemic sexism, they had to dig deep into the archives to learn about the EEOC action, filed as the "Women in Revolt" cover hit newsstands. Hopefully all women in journalism and/or media will be able to avoid that and simply pick up **The Good Girls Revolt**, and perhaps even hand it to their bosses.

Povich provides her own personal story, along with truncated stories for many of the women involved. Not only is it interesting to learn about their experiences in a macro sense, their individual career arcs are also intriguing, particularly those whose reluctance to claim their own success interfered with it. And, all the angst these women felt while planning for the action provides for some of the book's best moments, which reads during those scenes like a suspense novel what with secret meetings, concern about moles, etc. With the Mad Men like backdrop of hard-drinking, horny male writers and editors, it fits perfectly into today's zeitgeist.

I liked this book a great deal and recommend it to women of all ages...those my age, those my daughter's age, and all those in-between. It should be required reading in every newsroom today (Internet, print, broadcast), and be a part of many a college curricula. What keeps it from earning a higher rating? Well,

Povich, who had a remarkable career, shortchanges her own experiences, and while I liked reading about some of her colleagues, I wish she had been more thorough with their stories. However, when my biggest criticism of a book is that it leaves me wanting more, I realize that's a minor quibble.

(The publisher provided this book via Netgalley.)

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### **Katherine says**

This book is an important read about a bangin subject, but unfortunately for me the writing felt a little bit flat. I know it's a major feminist fail for me to acknowledge that this wasn't the perfect book, but I gotta be real. I felt like the book was way too journalistic for my taste. The story was so fucking plot and fact and event heavy that we never got to really connect with the ladies of the hour. Maybe it's just a personal preference for a style of writing, but for me the whole thing felt like reporting. Which makes sense because, hello, that's what these ladies do; but nonetheless I had a tough time really engaging with the material. Aside from stylistic issues, from a feminist perspective what these women fought for was awesome, and it was nice to see Oz admitting his own faults, white feminists acknowledging feminist racial tensions, and the fact that femmes - hard femmes, and straight feminine women - can be just as radical as everyone else.

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### **Jenni says**

Ugh, some parts of this were good. It's a capable enough history, but a lot of the editorializing is White Feminism incarnate. Hearing them whine at the end of the book that Jezebel had critiqued the intersectionality of the Modern newsweek girls was trying. "We didn't think sexism was still an issue" is a quote from women I simply can't identify with.

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### **Diane says**

My sons like to tease me and call me a feminist (yeah, they don't get it), a badge I proudly wear, so I was surprised that I knew nothing about the revolt by the women working at Newsweek magazine, who in 1970 brought a complaint to the EEOC against the magazine charging discrimination against them in hiring and promotion practices.

Lynn Povich, a writer who worked at Newsweek and was part of the suit, brings the story to life in *The Good Girls Revolt: How the Women at Newsweek Sued Their Bosses and Changed the Workplace*. The women were employed at the magazine as researchers, but were never promoted to writer or editor, even though they had similar education and experience as the men hired as researchers and quickly promoted to writer and editor.

Nora Ephron, who worked at the magazine, described the "caste system" "For every man there was an inferior woman, for every writer there was a checker", said Nora Ephron. "They were the artists and we were the drones. But what is interesting is how institutionally sexist it was without necessarily being personally sexist. To me, it wasn't oppressive. They were going to try to sleep with you-

and if you wanted to, you could. But no one was going to fire you for not sleeping with them." Mad Men's Madison Avenue offices weren't the only places where sex and booze ruled the workplace.

Povich is an excellent writer, and parts of this book, especially where the women were secretly meeting and trying to recruit other women to join the suit, read like a tense spy novel. Will they get caught?

They hired a young and pregnant Eleanor Holmes Norton to represent them. "The editors, who had supported the struggle for civil rights, were completely baffled by this pregnant black woman who questioned their commitment to equality."

The male editors, some of whom seemed like great guys, just didn't get it. What was worse in many of the women's eyes, was that Katherine Graham, who owned The Washington Post and Newsweek, didn't get it either. There is a powerful scene where Graham meets with the women and appears baffled by their action.

Along with the historical context of this story, I enjoyed reading about the inner workings of the magazine. We had a subscription for many years, and I always turned to read Anna Quindlen's back page column first. I had no idea that the struggle for equality there was so recent.

I recognized so many names in this book- Quindlen, Ephron, Eleanor Clift, Jane Bryant Quinn and Maureen Orth among them. But it is the names that I didn't know, they are the important names, the ones who laid it all on the line so that the above mentioned women would be well known. Women like Povich, Pat Lynden and Lucy Howard paved the way for the other women with this lawsuit.

This book is essential reading for all young women starting out in the workplace. They must know who fought the battles for them so that they have the opportunities now available to them. The women of Newsweek are heroes, and I think that this book would be perfect for a high school or college journalism curriculum. I was also lucky enough to meet Ms. Povich at this year's Book Expo America, a true honor.

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### **MargaretDH says**

This was an interesting insider account of the ways women's right jumped and inched forward in America. I liked how she chronicled the consciousness raising of the women, and how it played out with different men in the organization. I thought it was a fair and balanced recounting of all involved.

Only three stars because, though it was solidly written, nothing blew me out of the water. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend this to anyone who knows it will be of interest to them, but it's not the kind of thing you read to stir passion.

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### **K says**

Once again, I find myself in the minority.

Don't get me wrong. My dislike for this book is not a reflection of my feelings about the topic. I think it's great that these women sued "Newsweek" at great personal risk in the early 70s and eventually, paved the

way for women to begin breaking the glass ceiling in journalism. I admire their courage, their willingness to fight for what they believed in, and the fact that they actually achieved a great deal.

So I should have liked this book, right? Unfortunately, the writing really fell flat for me. It actually read like an overlong Newsweek article. Fact. Quote. Fact. Quote. Fact. Quote. Dry reportage, taking an interesting topic and somehow putting a lot of distance between the topic and myself. Lynn Povich was apparently a highly successful journalist, but her writing in this book left me completely cold. I also think the book may have worked better as an article. It felt stretched out to me, with a lot of unnecessary detail and really, not all that much to say.

I probably would have done better with the wikipedia page.

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### **Chelsey says**

The story is fascinating, but all of the facts bogged it down for me--which is no fault of the author's, that's just how non-fiction, especially in this case, works. Definitely a case of it's not you, it's me--I just don't gel as well with non-fiction.

STILL, an important story that is sadly still relevant today.

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### **Katie says**

I really wanted to absolutely love this book. The story itself is awesome, but the writing was pretty dry. I wish that Povich had written with the passion the women of Newsweek must have felt at the time she's writing about. It is extremely factual, and the structure is very strict. Each woman involved gets a nice tidy paragraph or two with her history (both at the end and throughout the text as they are mentioned), and a quote or two thrown in. It's written very much like a long news article; it makes sense as to the writer's background, but at the same time, the title is more exciting than the actual text. Very, very much worth reading for the information, but I felt it could've gone deeper and the style could have been a bit more memoir/personal than strict articulation of facts and events.

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### **Ngiste says**

This one is hard to review. The story is important and inspirational. It also carries many of the flaws of that era's feminism, further burdened by a pre-2016 feminism and social activism. It is hard to absorb the ingrained patriarchy in some quotes. There are women who participated in the lawsuit and yet remained worried about being a good girl, women who didn't think they should take jobs from men. However, there was also important insight in how people can grow and change.

It's a 3.5 stars--I think this book needs an update to include more analysis that puts this one fight into context with broader social justice fights. I made my notes public because the most common things I highlighted were because it invoked a reaction of "that is inspiring" or "whew, chile...white feminism..."

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### **Emily says**

The author is only a few years older than I am, so I really related to the personal part of her story--what she expected when she went to college, and how different real life became. I never worked for a news magazine, but I did have summer jobs at Reader's Digest. Things may have changed for women in today's workplace, but as the author notes, not yet enough. Any young woman who thinks that there must be something wrong with them should read this book and see that it is more likely to be the culture.

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### **Mythili says**

I knew this would be incredibly informative but I underestimated how extraordinarily infuriating it would be too. An eye-opener into what our newsrooms and media workplaces looked like just 30 and 40 years ago, and a reminder of how much more agitating women have to do in the workplace. This is a very fast read that does a nice job of situating the Newsweek fight into the broader context of the women's liberation movement as well as the historically fratty "boys club" culture of American journalism.

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### **Travis says**

A quick read and an excellent history of how the work environment has changed. It is honestly astounding what used to be okay. It is equally astounding what still is okay.

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### **Ali says**

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Lynn Povich

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### **Meredith Holley says**

OH MY GOD!

oh my god.

Oh my god, I love this book!! I love histories of women that make me freak out, and this one does that. This gives me goose bumps. The descriptions of the conflict these women felt between wanting to be good girls and realizing that being a good girl means becoming a shell and disappearing are so beautiful and told so well. Povich is brilliant, and it's clear that she has so much compassion and understanding for women who reacted very differently to the discrimination they all felt.

And look at that cover! That cover alone makes me freak out. AAAAAAAAHHHHH. I am reduced to inarticulate babbling because of my love for this book. I love you, book! I love you and miss you! Don't be over, book! I neeeeeed. I think this book is going to have to take out a stalking order against me.

Rather than only inarticulately freaking out, I will tell you something of what this book is about, I guess. It tells the story of the women who worked at *Newsweek* in the late '60s and early '70s filing class action lawsuits under the recently passed (1964) Civil Rights Act (Title VII). Mostly, though, it draws out all of this intense humanity from the internal and external conflict surrounding the women's decision to sue and the reactions from the magazine.

It gets the sentiments from both sides so right, and it is compassionate, while still being direct. Povich starts the story with a few girls working at *Newsweek* in 2009 and waking up to the discrimination they were experiencing, and then it tracks back to the parallel story of the women in the '60s. You never want to hear a story like this told in a way that villainizes one group or another – the women or men or the advocates for racial equality, etc. – and this one so gracefully conveys nuance in the reactions from all sides. Oh my god, how is this story not well-known American folklore???

So, the women at *Newsweek* ultimately filed two class actions with the EEOC. Their attorneys, a pregnant Eleanor Holmes Norton, and, later, a pregnant Harriet Rabb, kicked negotiation ass. It is so painful to read men saying, "Well, we are trying to not be racist anymore. Isn't that enough for you?" as though the main consideration of anti-discrimination efforts is to make white men better people. And it is painful to read women disappearing to accommodate society, but Povich tells both of those points of view smartly and compassionately. Of course, though, she includes Eleanor Holmes Norton responding to the men by saying, "The fact that you have two problems [race and sex discrimination] isn't my concern." And she also tells of the women she knew advocating for each other's skills and abilities and truly creating a sense of sisterhood and comradery, once they dropped their mutual suspicion, that is true to my experience of women working together.

Povich is also really interesting about the interplay of race and gender for the black women working at *Newsweek*. Ultimately, the entire group of black women opted out of the class action because of the tension between advocacy for racial equality and gender equality. As I understand it, there has always been that pressure on black women to be loyal to race above gender, as though they are mutually exclusive. And the sense that white women are complaining about a gilded cage, while the black women experienced a dank, rat-infested torture chamber, overwhelmed any sense of identification with the white women who first thought of the lawsuit. Povich, also, though, very articulately describes Eleanor Holmes Norton's take on race and gender advocacy, and that was absolutely brilliant to read. Oh my god, read this book.

When I first started law school, I was really surprised by a few of my women professors who were very competitive with women students in my class. I had just come from a male-dominated law firm in which women were relegated to a secretary ghetto, but most of the women in that ghetto were very supportive of each other. The more I thought about it, though, the more the competitiveness made sense to me. These women, becoming professionals in the '60s and '70s, fought tooth and nail to be where they are today. One of the professors who has been most competitive with me tells this story of how she was first in her class at law school, editor in chief of the law review, got the highest score on her bar exam, and she couldn't find a job after she graduated because she is a woman. Women are not welcome in society. So disgusting. So, it totally makes sense to me that when society sets it up that there is room for one token woman in a company, you would turn against other women. And it is impossible for me to feel angry at a woman who experienced that kind of discrimination and successfully retained a professional status. That is incredible, and even if it has, at times, resulted in a bad experience for me, it is the discrimination, not the women, that I blame.

Every time I talk to a woman, I hear stories like those in this book. Every woman has these stories, and they are incredible. I love them. I do not, of course, love the way discrimination dehumanizes women, but I do love when it turns us into warriors and when it makes us think of the women who will come after us and hope for a better life for them.

Thank you! Thank you, Lynn Povich, for writing this book! Thank you, women, for living bold lives. Thank you for being good girls, but thank you, also, for giving up that idea for those of us who would come after you. It makes us more willing to give that idea up, too, and stop lying to ourselves about who we are and what we want. Seeing you advocate for yourselves and each other makes me feel like, I, too, can be a real human with a life and a passion. Oh, gush gush. Read this freaking book, women, if you want to hear stories of people like you! Read this freaking book, men, if you want to know about women. People, read this book!

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I got a copy of this book from netgalley.

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### **Cynthia says**

So much progress, so much still to achieve.

I had the oddest feeling while reading this book that time both stands still even as it flees by. Povich starts the book with a vignette of three young professional women and their plight of career stagnation due to discrimination. Then she describes the stories of some of the principal complainants in the 1970 class action suit brought against 'Newsweek' for sex discrimination. Povich outlines not just their professional stories but also some of their relevant personal history including their outlooks on life, their career goals, and their unique personalities. This makes the story personal and the reader can't help but root for their triumph. It seems so ludicrous from this distance to realize a lot of these women had Ivy league educations yet were stuck in the mail or research rooms of 'Newsweek'. What a waste of an education, drive, and talent. They did win the suit but sadly, they had to continue to fight for what they'd supposedly won through the courts. An entrenched social system doesn't change overnight. Also, not everyone longs to be at the top, many are content with fulfilling jobs that allow time for a family life. The downside to the situation is the women who'd been exiled to fact checking for the male writers sometimes didn't aspire to be writers but felt compelled to try out for that slot after the suit and if they succeeded in becoming a writer they felt obligated to write 'hard' news rather than arts and culture articles regardless of their interests. Worst of all few of the women who lodged the suit benefited personally from it. It was the women who came after them who were able to take advantage of the opportunities these women made possible. Povich walks us through the decades post-suit and what that meant for women.

One of the worst enemies for women then and now is the desire to be 'nice', to be a team player, and to be thought well of. Women in positions of power are much more likely to be disliked than those in the typing pool. Worst of all finding a mentor is a challenge for women. Men can more easily find an older, more successful man to teach him the ropes, someone who will champion him and his career goals. Standing out or achieving recognition as a woman is seen as being pushy and rude. Not so for men especially if they have someone powerful to back them. It was then that I realized how relatively recent some of these changes were. And sadly the experiences of Jessica, Jesse, and Sara, the three women who sued for more job opportunities and less discrimination in 2010, still felt the sting of a culture that underestimates women and the family in general even today. This is a fascinating history of the workplace and I love how Povich informs on how both sexes benefited and/or were deprived of finding a work situation that best fit for them. So much progress, so much still to achieve.

This review is based on an e-galley provided by the publisher.

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