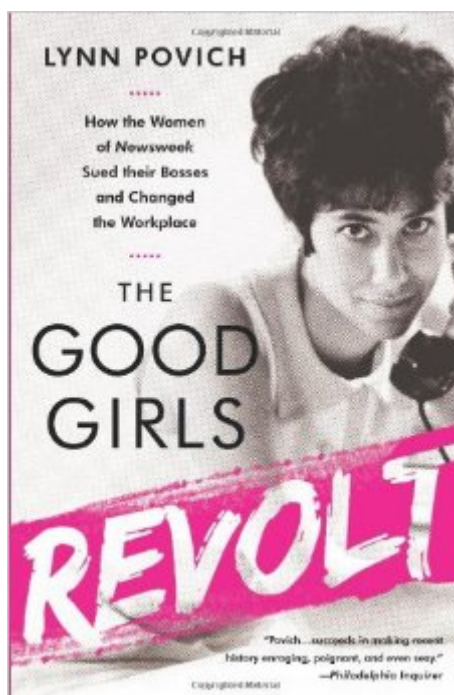


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# The Good Girls Revolt: How The Women Of Newsweek Sued Their Bosses And Changed The Workplace



## Synopsis

The inspiration for the new *Original Pilot* was the 1960s—a time of economic boom and social strife. Young women poured into the workplace, but the “Help Wanted” ads were segregated by gender and the “Mad Men” office culture was rife with sexual stereotyping and discrimination. Lynn Povich was one of the lucky ones, landing a job at *Newsweek*, renowned for its cutting-edge coverage of civil rights and the “Swinging Sixties.” Nora Ephron, Jane Bryant Quinn, Ellen Goodman, and Susan Brownmiller all started there as well. It was a top-notch job—for a girl—at an exciting place. But it was a dead end. Women researchers sometimes became reporters, rarely writers, and never editors. Any aspiring female journalist was told, “If you want to be a writer, go somewhere else.” On March 16, 1970, the day *Newsweek* published a cover story on the fledgling feminist movement entitled “Women in Revolt,” forty-six *Newsweek* women charged the magazine with discrimination in hiring and promotion. It was the first female class action lawsuit—the first by women journalists—and it inspired other women in the media to quickly follow suit. Lynn Povich was one of the ringleaders. In *The Good Girls Revolt*, she evocatively tells the story of this dramatic turning point through the lives of several participants. With warmth, humor, and perspective, she shows how personal experiences and cultural shifts led a group of well-mannered, largely apolitical women, raised in the 1940s and 1950s, to challenge their bosses—and what happened after they did. For many, filing the suit was a radicalizing act that empowered them to “find themselves” and fight back. Others lost their way amid opportunities, pressures, discouragements, and hostilities they weren’t prepared to navigate. *The Good Girls Revolt* also explores why changes in the law didn’t solve everything. Through the lives of young female journalists at *Newsweek* today, Lynn Povich shows what has—and hasn’t—changed in the workplace.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When the Newsweek editors decided to write a cover story about feminism in March 1970, it was a hot topic, just the sort of current events coverage that the news magazine was known for. The day the issue hit the stands, a group of women who worked at Newsweek filed a civil rights suit against the magazine. Newsweek was being sued for gender discrimination. Lynn Povich, one of the few women writers at Newsweek at the time, was one of forty-six women filing the suit, and she has gathered the documents and interviewed many of the people involved, on both sides, to ensure that the story isn't forgotten. The resulting book left me feeling both exhilarated at the progress they made in 1970 and beyond, and dismayed at the lost ground that will have to be fought over yet again. The case was almost laughably open and shut, from a legal standpoint. Women with Ivy League degrees were hired at Newsweek as secretaries or researchers, and rarely rose above that. Men with similar degrees were hired as writers and went on to become correspondents and editors. Women who tried to become writers were discouraged or simply passed over. The few who did become writers were paid lower wages than men at the same level. But the system was so entrenched that most of the women were reluctant to stir the pot. They were good girls. While some of the management at Newsweek were surprised that the women won the suit, they shouldn't have been. On the other hand, it probably shouldn't have been a big surprise to the women that two years after having won the case, there were even fewer women writers and editors at Newsweek than before. They had to sue again.

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.

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.

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