

LYNN POVICH

The inspiration
for the online
television
series

.....
How the Women
of *Newsweek*
Sued their Bosses
and Changed
the Workplace

.....
THE
**GOOD
GIRLS**

REVOLT



"As compelling as any novel.... Povich turns this epic revolt into a lesson on how and why we've just begun." —Gloria Steinem

A READING GUIDE to *The Good Girls Revolt*

We are providing the following supplementary materials—the 2010 Newsweek article discussed in the prologue, a Q & A with author Lynn Povich, and questions for discussion—to enhance your reading of *The Good Girls Revolt* and provide a jumping off point for reading group discussions. For more information about PublicAffairs books, visit us at publicaffairsbooks.com, at facebook.com/PublicAffairs, or follow @public_affairs on twitter.

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*In the prologue to *The Good Girls Revolt*, Lynn Povich introduces Jessica Bennett, Jesse Ellison, and Sarah Ball, three young women working at Newsweek in 2009 who unexpectedly find themselves struggling against gender discrimination. After Jessica, Jesse, and Sarah learn about the landmark gender discrimination lawsuit that Lynn and her colleagues filed against the magazine in 1970, they become “determined to write a piece for Newsweek questioning how much had actually changed for women at the magazine, in the media, and in the workplace in general” (p. xvii). Here is the piece they wrote, which Newsweek published in March, 2010.*

Are We There Yet?

In 1970, 46 women filed a landmark gender-discrimination case. Their employer was *Newsweek*. Forty years later, their contemporary counterparts question how much has actually changed.

By Jessica Bennett, Jesse Ellison, and Sarah Ball

They were an archetype: independent, determined young graduates of Seven Sisters colleges, fresh-faced, new to the big city, full of aspiration. Privately, they burned with the kind of ambition that New York encourages so well. Yet they were told in job interviews that women could never get to the top, or even the middle. They accepted positions anyway—sorting mail, collecting newspaper clippings, delivering coffee. Clad in short skirts and dark-rimmed glasses, they’d click around in heels, currying favor with the all-male management, smiling softly when the bosses called them “dollies.” That’s just the way the world worked then. Though each quietly believed she’d be the one to break through, ambition, in any real sense, wasn’t something a woman could talk about out loud. But by 1969, as the women’s movement gathered force around them, the dollies got restless. They began meeting in secret, whispering in the ladies’ room or huddling around a colleague’s desk. To talk freely they’d head to the Women’s Exchange, a 19th-century relic where they could chat discreetly on their lunch break. At first there were just three, then nine, then

ultimately 46—women who would become the first group of media professionals to sue for employment discrimination based on gender under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Their employer was *Newsweek* magazine.

Until six months ago, when sex- and gender-discrimination scandals hit ESPN, David Letterman's *Late Show*, and the *New York Post*, the three of us—all young *Newsweek* writers—knew virtually nothing of these women's struggle. Over time, it seemed, their story had faded from the collective conversation. Eventually we got our hands on a worn copy of *In Our Time*, a memoir written by a former *Newsweek* researcher, Susan Brownmiller, which had a chapter on the uprising. With a crumpled Post-it marking the page, we passed it around, mesmerized by descriptions that showed just how much has changed, and how much hasn't.

Forty years after *Newsweek's* women rose up, there's no denying our cohort of young women is unlike even the half-generation before us. We are post-Title IX women, taught that the fight for equality was history; that we could do, or be, anything. The three of us were valedictorians and state-champion athletes; we got scholarships and were the first to raise our hands in class. As young professionals, we cheered the third female Supreme Court justice and, nearly, the first female president. We've watched as women became the majority of American workers, prompting a Maria Shriver-backed survey on gender, released late last year, to proclaim that "the battle of the sexes is over."

The problem is, for women like us, the victory dance feels premature. Youthful impatience? Maybe. But consider this: U.S. Department of Education data show that a year out of school, despite having earned higher college GPAs in every subject, young women will take home, on average across all professions, just 80 percent of what their male colleagues do. Even at the top end, female M.B.A.s make \$4,600 less per year in their first job out of business school, according to a new Catalyst study. Motherhood has long been the explanation for the persistent pay gap, yet a decade out of college, full-time working women who *haven't* had children still make 77 cents on the male dollar. As women increasingly become the breadwinners in this recession, bringing home 23 percent less bacon hurts families more deeply than ever before. "The last decade was supposed to be the 'promised one,' and it turns out it wasn't," says James Turley, the CEO of Ernst & Young, a funder of the recent M.B.A. study. "This is a wake-up call."

In countless small ways, each of us has felt frustrated over the years, as if something was amiss. But as products of a system in which we learned that the fight for equality had been won, we didn't identify those feelings as gender-related. It seemed like a cop-out, a weakness, to suggest that the problem was anybody's fault but our own. It sounds naive—we know—especially since our own boss Ann McDaniel climbed the ranks to become *Newsweek's* managing director, overseeing all aspects of the company. Compared with the *Newsweek* dollies, what did we have to complain about? "If we judge by what we see in the media, it looks like women have it made," says author Susan Douglas. "And if women have it made, why would you be so ungrateful to point to something and call it sexism?"

Yet the more we talked to our friends and colleagues, the more we heard the same stories of disillusionment, regardless of profession. No one would dare say today that "women don't write here," as the *Newsweek* women were told 40 years ago. But men wrote all but six of *Newsweek's* 49 cover stories last year—and two of those used the headline "The Thinking Man." In 1970, 25 percent of *Newsweek's* editorial masthead was female; today that number is 39 percent. Better? Yes. But it's hardly equality. (Overall, 49 percent of the entire company, the business and editorial sides, is female.) "Contemporary young women enter the workplace full of enthusiasm, only to see their hopes dashed," says historian Barbara J. Berg. "Because for the first time they're slammed up against gender bias."

We should add that we are proud to work at *Newsweek*. (Really, boss, we are!) We write about our magazine not because we feel it's worse here, but because *Newsweek* was once ground zero for a movement that was supposed to break at least one glass ceiling. Just as our predecessors' 1970 case didn't happen in a vacuum, *Newsweek* today is neither unique nor unusual. Female bylines at major magazines are still outnumbered by seven to one; women are just 3 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs and less than a quarter of law partners and politicians. That imbalance even applies to the Web, where the founder of a popular copywriting Web site, Men With Pens, revealed late last year that "he" was actually a she. "I assumed if I chose a male name [I'd] be viewed as somebody who runs a company, not a mom sitting at home with a child hanging off her leg," the woman says. It worked: her business doubled once she joined the boys' club.

We know what you're thinking: we're young and entitled, whiny and humorless—to use a single, dirty word, feminists! But just as the first black president hasn't wiped out racism, a female at the top of a company doesn't eradicate sexism. In fact, those contradictory signs of progress—high-profile successes that mask persistent inequality—are precisely the problem. Douglas describes those mixed messages as “enlightened sexism”: the idea that because of all the gains women have made, biases that once would have been deemed sexist now get brushed off. Young women, consequently, are left in a bind: they worry they'll never be taken as seriously as the guys, yet when they're given the opportunity to run the show, they balk. A recent Girl Scouts study revealed that young women avoid leadership roles for fear they'll be labeled “bossy”; another survey found they are four times less likely than men to negotiate a first salary. As it turns out, that's for good reason: a Harvard study found that women who demand higher starting salaries are perceived as “less nice,” and thus less likely to be hired. “This generation has had it ingrained in them that they must thrive within a ‘yes, but’ framework: Yes, be a go-getter, but don't come on too strong. Yes, accomplish, but don't brag about it,” says Rachel Simmons, author of *The Curse of the Good Girl*. “The result is that young women hold themselves back, saying, ‘I shouldn't say this, ask for this, do this—it will make me unlikable, a bitch, or an outcast.’ ”

Somewhere along the road to equality, young women like us lost their voices. So when we marched into the workforce and the fog of subtle gender discrimination, it was baffling and alien. Without a movement behind us, we had neither the language to describe it nor the confidence to call it what it was. “It's so much easier when you're the generation that gets to fight against [specific] laws than it is to deal with these more complicated issues,” says Gail Collins, the *New York Times* columnist. In a highly sexualized, post-PC world, navigating gender roles at work is more confusing than ever. The sad truth is that when we do see women rise to the top, we wonder: was it purely their abilities, or did it have something to do with their looks? If a man takes an interest in our work, we can't help but think about the male superior who advised “using our sexuality” to get ahead, or the manager who winkingly asked one of us, apropos of nothing, to “bake me cookies.” One young colleague recalls being teased about the older male boss who lingered near her desk. “What am I supposed to do with that? Assume that's the explanation for any accomplishments? Assume my work isn't valuable?” she asks. “It gets in your head, which is the most insidious

part.”

Recognizing that sexism still exists despite its subtlety is one of the challenges of the new generation—though it doesn't hold a candle to what the dollies of 1970 pulled off. When they filed their legal complaint, the bottom tiers of the *Newsweek* masthead were filled almost exclusively by women. “It was a nice place—especially if you were a man,” says Nora Ephron, a *Newsweek* “mail girl” in 1962. The women reported on the murder of a colleague, the State Department, and the 1968 campaign. But when it came to writing, they were forced to hand over their reporting to their male colleagues. “It was a very hopeless time,” remembers Brownmiller. “After a while you really did start to lose your confidence. You started to think, ‘Writing is what the men do.’ ”

Over dinner one night, a young researcher poured out her frustration to a lawyer friend, who ordered her to call the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. She did, and slowly her colleagues signed on to a class-action suit. They found a fiery young lawyer—now D.C. Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton—and they waited, nervously, until the time was right. “We were very staid, ladylike, not guerrilla-theater types,” says Pat Lynden, one of the group's early organizers, who wrote cover stories for *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The New York Times Magazine* even while she wasn't allowed to write for *Newsweek*. “But eventually we just couldn't take it anymore.”

A year later, as the national women's movement gathered steam, *Newsweek's* all-male management decided to put feminism on their cover. Oblivious to the rebellion brewing at home, they looked past the legions of *Newsweek* women and went outside the building for a writer—to the wife of one of their top brass, whom they would ultimately describe, in an editor's note, as “a top-flight journalist who is also a woman.” It was the final straw. The night before the issue hit newsstands, the *Newsweek* women sent a memo announcing a press conference. They pooled their money to fly a colleague to Washington to present a copy to Katharine Graham, the magazine's owner, who later asked, “Which side am I supposed to be on?” Then on Monday, March 16, 1970, the *Newsweek* women did what journalists do best: they took their story public. Crowded into a makeshift conference room at the ACLU, *Newsweek's* “news hens” (as a local tabloid called them) held up a copy of their magazine, whose bright yellow cover told their own story: “Women in Revolt.” Two days later the women of *The Ladies' Home Journal* would

stage their own sit-in; others were soon to follow.

It was a moment of hope, one that set the stage for a wave of progress that continued rapidly through the 1990s. Twenty years after the *Newsweek* dollies rose up, mothers were entering the workforce in unprecedented numbers, women's organizations such as NOW saw surges in membership, and expanded affirmative-action programs ensured that girls had equal access to education. "Girl power" became the new female mantra, and young women's empowerment groups sprang up at YWCAs. By 2000, when the female employment rate peaked, many women thought the job was done.

In the years since, there has been what Douglas describes as "a subtle, insidious backlash." In the face of 9/11, two wars, and now the Great Recession, gender equality—and stereotyping—became a secondary concern. Feminism was no longer a label to be worn with pride; Britney Spears and Paris Hilton now dominated airwaves. But the changes were more than cultural. The Global Gender Gap Index—a ranking of women's educational, health, political, and financial standing by the World Economic Forum—found that from 2006 to 2009 the United States had fallen from 23rd to 31st, behind Cuba and just above Namibia. Companies may have incorporated policies aimed at helping women, but they haven't helped as much as you'd think. "The U.S. always scores abysmally in terms of work-life balance," says the WEF's Kevin Steinberg. "But even here, [women] still rank 'masculine or patriarchal corporate culture' as the highest impediment to success." Exhibit A: the four most common female professions today are secretary, registered nurse, teacher, and cashier—low-paying, "pink collar" jobs that employ 43 percent of all women. Swap "domestic help" for nurse and you'd be looking at the top female jobs from 1960, back when want ads were segregated by gender.

The women of *Newsweek* thought, or hoped, they'd begun to solve these problems four decades ago. Yet here we are. "It's sad," says Lynden, now 72. "Because we fought for all that." There's no denying that we're enjoying many of the spoils of those women's victories. We are no longer huddled in secret; we're reporting for a national magazine, and we're the ones doing the writing. We have a president whose first act in office was to sign a law that promises equal pay for equal work. Yet the fact that such a law is necessary makes the point: equality is still a myth.

“We’ve got the entire weight of human history behind us, making us feel like we’re kind of lucky to have jobs,” says writer Ariel Levy. “And I think it takes a lot of fearlessness to think, ‘F--k it, go ahead and yell at me, I’m going to fight for what I deserve.’ ” We’ve come a long way, baby. But there’s still a long way to go.

With Sam Register and Tony Skaggs

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A Conversation with Lynn Povich

What inspired you to write The Good Girls Revolt—and what worried you about writing it?

I’m at the age when one looks back more than looks forward. I realized that the *Newsweek* lawsuit had been one of the most influential events in my life—and no one knew about it. The history of our lawsuit had been lost and our legacy as the first women in the media to sue for gender discrimination had been forgotten. I wanted to tell the story of these brave women who opened the doors for so many female journalists—and many other women—so that at least my children, if not the next generation, would know.

However, I worried that no one would be interested in a lawsuit that happened forty years ago—important as it was. There has been great progress for women and people don’t think about filing lawsuits as we did in the “protest decades” of the Sixties and Seventies. That was then—this is now. So I was blessed when I got a call in 2010 from three young women working at *Newsweek* who were experiencing similar obstacles in the workplace as we had forty years earlier. They had just found out about our lawsuit and were eager to hear about it. I realized our story still resonated and had relevance to young women in the workplace today.

How hard was it to interview people forty years after the event and did anyone object?

I wouldn’t advise doing it! Some people have excellent memories but most of us are very selective in what we remember. Although I had the legal papers from the lawsuit, there wasn’t any other original material so I had to report most of the book and reconstruct the story from interviews. The problems arose when someone’s “clear” memory conflicted with another’s “clear” memory. At those times I tried to triangulate and call others to see what they thought. And when I couldn’t figure out which story was truly accurate, I resorted to saying, “As so-and-so remembered it.”

Almost all of the women I interviewed were happy to talk because, like me, they wanted the story to get out. Only one woman, who gave me a long and very helpful interview, asked me not to quote her so I didn't. But I knew a lot of her story from my own experience and others did too, so she is well represented in the book and is an important character.

What did you learn in writing the book?

There were stories women told me that truly shocked and dismayed me. The researcher who was not only stalked by her Senior Editor, which I did know, but who was told that if she didn't marry him she would have to leave, which I didn't know. Trish Reilly's story of turning down two promotions, panicking, and leaving Newsweek. And the story of Oz Elliott calling Fay Willey—twice--the night before we were going to sign our lawsuit to ask her to stop it and suggest that if we filed it, it would contribute to the Nixon Administration's threats to take away the TV licenses of The Washington Post Company, which owned *Newsweek*.

I also learned a lot from the young women in the book who were working at *Newsweek* in 2010. It was interesting to me that when they came upon obstacles at work they didn't identify it as a gender issue. Like us forty years earlier, they thought it was them—they just weren't good enough. That surprised me because this generation was raised in the era of Girl Power. They were also told that you can be anything, you can do anything, the sex wars are over and there's a level playing field, which may be true for girls in school—but not so much in the work world. So learning about our story and meeting us changed their lives, too, and brought me in touch with this next generation of working women.

What surprised you about the responses to the book—positive and negative?

I figured that women who lived through the Sixties and Seventies would respond positively to the book because we all have these stories—and they have. Many are reading *The Good Girls Revolt* in their book clubs and giving it to their daughters so that they will know what the times were like for women and what their mothers went through.

What surprised me was how positively young women have responded to the book. I've been asked to speak to many colleges and universities, to people who have no idea of what women were up against back then. And they are fascinated. One reason is they can't believe how bad it was! It's like reading about the Middle Ages—people actually said that? But they are also interested in the personal struggles we went through because they are going through them, too--struggles about ambition, career, family issues, and managing it all –and, of course, sexism, which still exists even on campus.

I haven't heard too many negative responses. When I have it's from people who think women have succeeded and there isn't much gender discrimination anymore. If anything, they say we have to worry about the men.

What do you think about the current public discussion on women in the workplace today, the issues raised by Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer and Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg?

I give Sheryl Sandberg a lot of credit. When I was Editor-in-Chief of *Working Woman* magazine, I interviewed a lot of female CEOs and almost none of them wanted to be called a female CEO nor did they want to talk about women's issues. So I applaud her putting herself on the line for feminism and raising these issues. She restarted an important conversation and look; we're still talking about it.

Sheryl Sandberg's book, *Lean In*, has a lot of research and advice about gender bias in the workplace. Her book is about getting women into leadership positions so she focused a lot of the book on how women hold themselves back as well as the institutional barriers. And she raises very interesting points about women—especially younger women—not pushing themselves forward, not taking on riskier assignments, holding themselves back because they're considering having a family. And many younger women are grateful for her advice. One more thing: Sheryl Sandberg talks about an “ambition gap”—that women have to be more ambitious at work and men more ambitious at home. I think what she really means is that women have a “confidence gap”—still—and that's what I find fascinating.

As for Marissa Mayer, like all women at the top, everyone is looking at her and she's got big problems at Yahoo. So I understand that her priority is to make Yahoo successful. She felt she had to have everyone in the office to do that so she cancelled Yahoo's flexible hours policy. I think there are more reasonable ways to get people into the office without penalizing everyone and I don't think that is the way the workplace is evolving. All the research says that flexible hours increase productivity, health and morale.

What happened to the three young women who were working at Newsweek in 2010, Jessica Bennett, Sarah Ball and Jesse Ellison?

They all are doing very well in journalism but not at *Newsweek*. Sarah Ball is the Deputy Editor of *Vanityfair.com*. Jessica Bennett is a freelance journalist and editor-at-large for Sheryl Sandberg's “Lean In” foundation, which aims to increase the number of women in leadership positions. Jesse Ellison is now doing free-lance journalism. Sadly, in December 2012, *Newsweek* printed its last magazine edition and is now available only in digital form.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. What motivated the *Newsweek* women to sue their bosses? Do you think they should have aired their complaints to management first? Would you have joined the group? Do you think your mother would have joined? Your daughter?
2. What did you think about the choice *Newsweek*'s black researchers made not to participate in the suit?
3. What was the impact of the Women's Movement on the *Newsweek* women? How was feminism portrayed through the leading characters in *Good Girls Revolt*: the researchers, Liz Peer, Fay Willey, Eleanor Holmes Norton, Katharine Graham, and Lynn Povich herself?
4. How did the legal styles of Eleanor Holmes Norton and Harriet Rabb differ and why?
5. Why was the law suit ultimately so effective? What were the factors that contributed to the *Newsweek* women's success? And why do you think their case was largely forgotten over the years?
6. How do the *Newsweek* women change over the course of the narrative? What did you think about the women who couldn't make the transition to being "liberated" professional working women?
7. In the interview with Lynn Povich included in this reading guide, she makes a distinction between an 'ambition gap' and a 'confidence gap' inhibiting women in the work world. Do you agree? What, if anything, do you think inhibits you?
8. Have you had an insight or experience that ended up changing you, the way Lynn's and her colleagues' recognition that the "rules of work" were unjust, changed them?
9. What do you think about the attitudes of the young women working at *Newsweek* in 2010? What do you think has changed and hasn't changed for women in the workplace today compared to 40 years ago?
10. In telling the story of the first and the second rounds of the law suit, Povich draws a distinction between legal change and cultural change; between 'official policy' and how things actually happen on the ground. What stories in the book illuminate that distinction? Have you recognized or experienced similar 'disconnects' and discrepancies in your own life, or see them in the world around you?
11. If you saw something illegal or immoral happening in your workplace today, what would you do about it?

