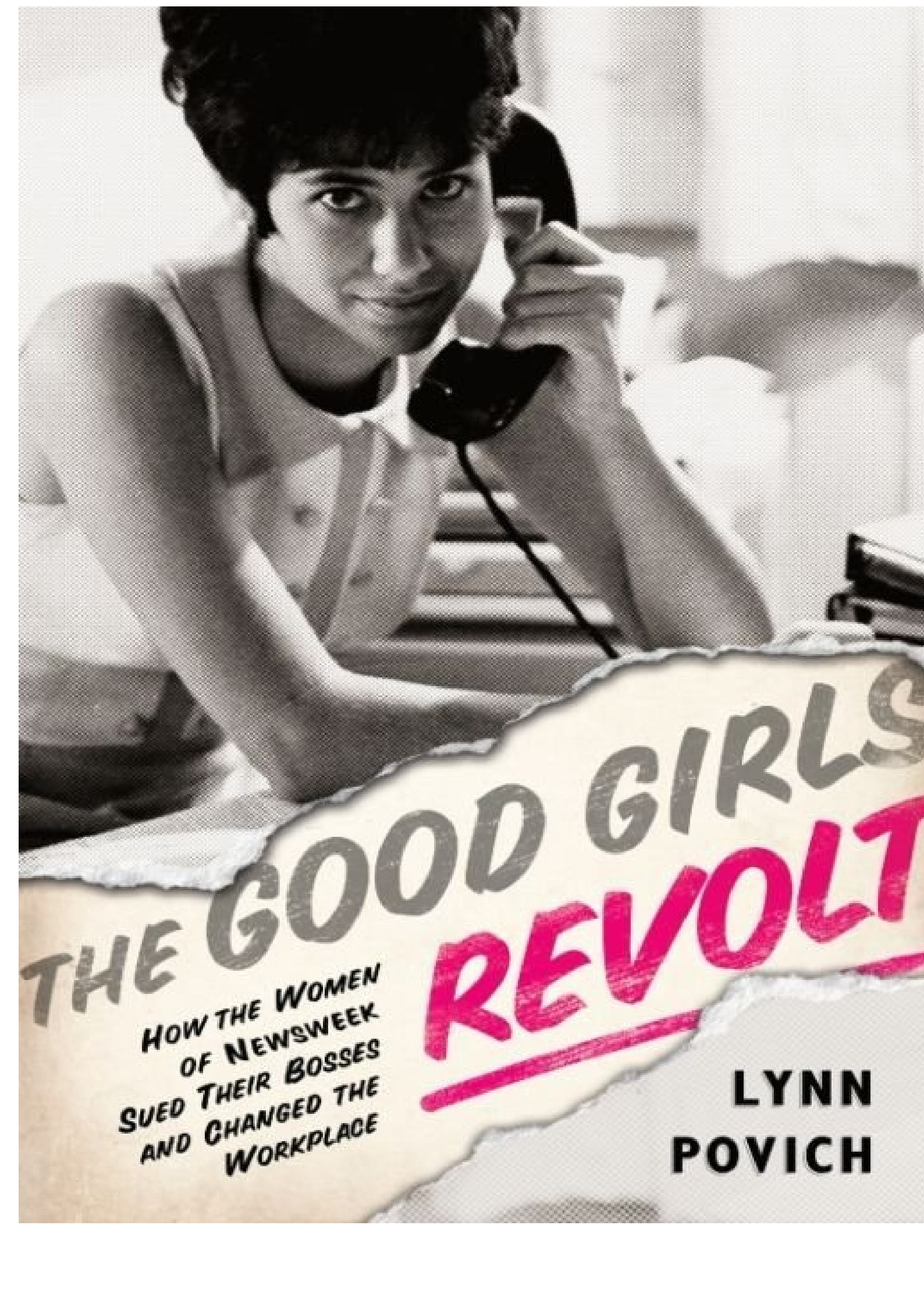


# THE GOOD GIRLS REVOLT

HOW THE WOMEN  
OF NEWSWEEK  
SUED THEIR BOSSES  
AND CHANGED THE  
WORKPLACE

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Sued Their Bosses and Changed the Workplace

Lynn Povich



PublicAffairs  
*New York*



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For Steve, Sarah, and Ned  
and for the Newsweek women

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# PROLOGUE

## WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM?

JESSICA BENNETT GREW UP in the era of Girl Power. It was the 1980s, when young women were told there was no limit to what they could accomplish. The daughter of a Seattle attorney, Jessica regularly attended Take Your Daughter to Work Day with her dad and was the academic star in her family, excelling over her younger brothers and male peers. In high school, she was a member of Junior Statesmen of America, a principal in the school orchestra, and a varsity soccer player. Jessica was accepted to the University of Southern California, her first choice, but transferred after freshman year to Boston University because it had a stronger journalism program. When the Boston Globe offered a single internship to a BU student, she was the recipient.

Then Jessica got a job at Newsweek and suddenly encountered obstacles she couldn't explain. She had started as an intern on the magazine in January 2006 and was about to be hired when three guys showed up for summer internships. At the end of the summer, the men were offered jobs but Jessica wasn't, even though she was given one of their stories to rewrite. Despite the fact that she was writing three times a week on Newsweek's website, her internship kept getting extended. Even after she was hired in January 2007, Jessica had to battle to get her articles published, while guys with the same or less experience were getting better assignments and faster promotions. "Initially I didn't identify it as a gender issue," she recalled. "But several of us women had been feeling like we weren't doing a good job or accomplishing what we wanted to. We didn't feel like we were being heard."

Being female was not something that ever held Jessica back. "I was used to getting everything I wanted and working hard for it," said the twenty-eight-year-old writer at [Newsweek.com](http://Newsweek.com), "so my feeling was, why do I need feminism? Why do I need to take a women's studies course? And, of course, there was the stereotype of the feminist—the angry, man-hating, granola-crunching, combat-boot-wearing woman. I don't know that I consciously thought that, but I think a lot of young women do. I went to public school in the inner city, so issues of racial justice were more interesting to me than gender because, frankly, gender wasn't really an issue."

Her best friend at Newsweek, Jesse Ellison, was also frustrated. She had recently discovered that the guy who replaced her in her previous job was given a significantly higher salary. She was doing well as the number two to the editor of Scope, the opening section of the magazine that featured inside scoops and breaking news. But that summer, a half-dozen college-age "dudes" had come in a

summer interns and suddenly the department turned into a frat house. Guys were high-fiving, turning the TV from CNN to ESPN, constantly invading her cubicle and asking her, as if she were their mother, whether they should microwave their lunches. They were also getting assigned stories while she had to pitch all her ideas. Since a new boss had taken over, Jesse felt as if she had been demoted. She didn't know what to do.

Jesse, thirty, sought the advice of a trusted editor who had been a mentor to her. He told her, "You're senior to them—shame them." Then he said, "The problem is that you're so pretty you need to figure out a way to use your sexuality to your advantage," she recalled, still incredulous about the remark. "Even though I think he was just being an idiot for saying this—because he had really fought for me—hearing that changed my perception of the previous six months. It was like, 'Wait a minute! Were you being an advocate for me because you think I'm pretty and you want me in your office? And, more important, is this what other people in the office think? Not that I'm actually talented, but this is about something else?' It really screwed with my head."

Jesse had grown up in a conservative town outside Portland, Maine. Her mother, a former hippie who was divorced, had started a small baby-accessories business. During the Clarence Thomas Supreme Court hearings, Jesse was the only one in her eighth-grade class to support Anita Hill. She went to a co-ed boarding school, where she was valedictorian of her class, and then to Barnard, an all-women's college, where she graduated cum laude. She, too, never took a women's studies course. "I just felt like I didn't need it," she said. "Feminism was a given—it was Barnard!" After a brief job at a nonprofit, she enrolled part-time in Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. She also got an internship on the foreign language editions of Newsweek and was hired full-time when she graduated with her master's degree in June 2008. But now, a year later, she, too, was struggling to move ahead at Newsweek. What was the problem?

"It wasn't like I believed that sexism didn't exist," said Jesse. "It was just that it didn't occur to me that what was happening at work was sexism. Maybe it was because we are a highly individualized culture now and I had always done really well. So I just assumed that everything that was happening was on the basis of merit. I grew up reading Newsweek and I had tremendous respect for it. I felt like, I'm in this world of real thinkers and writers and I have to prove myself. The fact that I wasn't being given assignments was simply an indication that they didn't think I was good enough yet. It didn't occur to me that it was about anything else. For the first time in my life, I was feeling inadequate and insecure."

Jessica Bennett felt the same way. "Maybe it's a female tendency to turn inward and blame yourself, but I never thought about sexism," she said. "We had gotten into the workforce and then something suddenly changed and we didn't know what it was. After all, we had always accomplished everything we had set out to do, so naturally we would think we were doing something wrong—not that there was something wrong. It was us, not it."

What was the problem? After all, women composed nearly 40 percent of the Newsweek masthead in 2009. It wasn't like the old days, when there was a ghetto

of women in the research department from which they couldn't get promoted. In fact, there were no longer researchers on the magazine, except in the library. Young editorial employees now started as researcher-reporters. There were women writers at Newsweek, several female columnists and senior editors, and at least two women in top management. Ann McDaniel, a former Newsweek reporter and top editor, was now the managing director of the magazine in charge of both the business and editorial sides—a first. So it couldn't be that old thing called discrimination that was inhibiting their progress. The fight for equality had been won. Women could do anything now at Newsweek and elsewhere. Hadn't Mary Shriver's report on American women just come out in October 2009, declaring, "The battle of the sexes is over"?

Jesse and Jessica stewed about the situation, discussing it with other Newsweek women and friends outside the magazine, who, it turned out, were also feeling discouraged in their careers. "It felt so good just talking to each other," recalled Jesse. "It was like, 'Oh my God, I'm so sick of feeling silent and scared. It's not fair and we should say something.' That impulse was great; knowing that 'I'm not alone' was empowering."

One day Jen Molina, a Newsweek video producer, was talking about the magazine's "old boys club" to Tony Skaggs, a veteran researcher in the library. Tony informed her that many years before, the women at Newsweek had sued the magazine's management on the grounds of sex discrimination. Jen was shocked. She had no idea this had happened—and at her own magazine. She told Jessica, who told Jesse, and the two friends began investigating. Jessica immediately Googled "Newsweek lawsuit" and "women sue Newsweek" but she couldn't find any reference online. "Funny," she remarked, "we're trained in digital journalism so we think if it's not on Google, it doesn't exist."

A few weeks later, Tony walked into Jessica's office with a worn copy of Susan Brownmiller's vivid chronicle of the women's movement, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution*. A crumpled Post-it note marked the chapter mentioning a lawsuit at Newsweek in 1970, almost forty years earlier. "I just remember sitting at my desk reading it," she said, "and every two sentences saying, 'Holy shit,' because I couldn't believe this had happened and I didn't know about it! So I instantly messaged Jesse and said, 'You have to get over here and read this.' Why didn't we know this? Why has this died? And why was there only one person in the research department who had to get this book for us to let us know about it?"

When they read about the case, it all seemed so familiar. "We realized we weren't far from the first to feel discrimination," said Jesse. "So much of the language and culture was still the same. It helped drive home the fact that it was still the same place, the same institutional knowledge, the same Newsweek."

This happened in the fall of 2009, just as a scandal at CBS's *Late Show* with David Letterman was making headlines. Joe Halderman, a CBS News producer who was living with one of Letterman's assistants, had found her diary revealing her ongoing affair with her boss. Halderman threatened to expose the relationship if Letterman didn't give him \$2 million. On October 1, Letterman confessed—on air—that yes, "I have had sex with women who work for me on the

show.” That same month, ESPN analyst Steve Phillips, a former general manager for the New York Mets baseball team, was fired from the sports network after admitting that he had an affair with a twenty-two-year-old production assistant. In November, editor Sandra Guzman, who was fired from the New York Post, filed a complaint against the newspaper and its editor-in-chief alleging “unlawful employment practices and retaliation” as well as sexual harassment and a hostile work environment. (The case is pending in Manhattan federal court.)

The Letterman scandal infuriated Sarah Ball, a twenty-three-year-old Culture reporter at Newsweek, particularly after she read an article by a former Letterman writer. “I was galvanized by Nell Scovell’s story on [VanityFair.com](http://VanityFair.com),” she recalled Sarah, who cited the beginning of the piece by heart: “At this moment there are more females serving on the United States Supreme Court than there are writing for Late Show with David Letterman, The Jay Leno Show, and The Tonight Show with Conan O’Brien combined. Out of the fifty or so comedy writers working on these programs, exactly zero are women. It would be funny if it weren’t true.” Sarah told her editor, Marc Peyser, about the piece and in the course of the conversation, Peyser suggested a story on young women in the workforce, pegged to the scandals. “He was really into it,” Sarah recalled. “He kept saying, ‘This could be a cover, this could be a cover.’” Sarah, who had seen the Brownmiller book, immediately told Jessica and Jesse about Peyser’s interest. The three women went back into his office and pitched a story combining the old and new elements. “It was perfect,” said Jesse. “It was bigger than us, we had our own narrative that we felt was important, and there was the forthcoming fortieth anniversary of the lawsuit in March.”

Peyser had heard about the lawsuit and told them that it had gone all the way to the US Supreme Court. That night, Jesse started searching online through all the 1970 Supreme Court cases but found nothing mentioning Newsweek. “We knew there was something about a lawsuit,” she said, “but we didn’t know what it meant.” Jessica finally paid to search the New York Times archives, where several articles on the lawsuit turned up. “I was bouncing out of my chair I was so excited,” she said. “We knew we had to do something but it still wasn’t clear from those clips whether the suit had been settled or whether it actually went to court.”

The three women spent the next few weeks digging deeper and calling various sources, including Susan Brownmiller and some former Newsweek women whose names were mentioned in the book. I was one of the women. Jessica and Jesse contacted me when they learned that I was writing about the case. They wanted to find out what had happened and why. They were 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.

When I met the two young women for lunch, they reminded me so much of my friends and myself forty years earlier. We, too, had been bright young things, full of energy and expectations. We also had been thrilled to be working at an important magazine and we, too, had begun to realize that something wasn’t right at Newsweek. But if they were post-feminists, we were pre-feminists. Unlike these

young women, many of us were far more conflicted about our ambitions and clueless about having a career. My only desire after college was to go to Paris, and I was lucky enough to get a job there as a secretary in the Newsweek bureau. I never imagined that five years later, I would be suing the magazine for sex discrimination.

As I listened to Jessica and Jesse struggle to understand what they were feeling—their marginalization, the sexual banter and innuendo, the career cakewalk for men their age—it reminded me of “the problem that had no name” that Betty Friedan had defined in her 1963 groundbreaking book, *The Feminine Mystique*, that “strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction” of the American housewife who “as she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—‘Is this all?’”

Friedan’s “problem” did not apply to working-class women, who had to earn their living but were confined mainly to low-paying jobs. It was the condition of the postwar suburban housewife. Although many middle-class women had been recruited to work during World War II, they were forced to go home when the soldiers returned. For educated women, whose husbands could support them, not having to work was seen as a status symbol until, as Betty Friedan pointed out, many of them realized they wanted—needed—something more than a husband and children.

Finding meaningful work, however, was not easy. In just about every industry “office work” for women meant secretarial jobs and typing pools. Even in creative fields, such as book publishing, advertising, and journalism, where there was a pool of educated females, women were given menial jobs. In the 1950s, full-time working women earned on average between fifty-nine and sixty-four cents for every dollar men earned in the same job. (It wasn’t until the passage of the Equal Pay Act in June 1963 that it became illegal to pay women a lower rate for the same job.) And there were very few professional women. Until around 1970, women comprised fewer than 10 percent of students in medical school, 4 percent of law school students, and only 3 percent of business school students.

At Newsweek, our “problem that had no name” in the mid-1960s was sexism, pure and simple. At both Time and Newsweek, only men were hired as writers. Women were almost always hired on the mail desk or as fact checkers and rarely promoted to reporter or writer. Even with similar credentials, women generally ended up in lesser positions than men. One summer, two graduates of the Columbia Journalism School were hired—he as a writer and she as a research reporter. That’s just the way it was, and we all accepted it.

Until we didn’t. Just as young women today are discovering that post-feminism isn’t really “post,” we were discovering that civil rights didn’t include women’s rights. Just like Jesse, Jessica, and Sarah, we began to realize that something was very wrong with the Newsweek system. With great trepidation, we decided to take on what we saw as a massive injustice: a segregated system of journalism that divided research, reporting, writing, and editing roles solely on the basis of

gender. We began organizing in secret, terrified that we would be found out—and fired—at any moment. For most of us middle-class ladies, standing up for our rights marked the first time we had done anything political or feminist. It would be the radicalizing act that gave us the confidence and the courage to find ourselves and stake our claim.

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THIS BOOK IS THE FIRST full account of that landmark Newsweek case, the story of how and why we became the first women in the media to sue for sex discrimination. Like *Mad Men*, the popular TV series on life at an advertising agency in the 1960s, not only does our tale reflect the legal and cultural limits for women at the time, but it also is a coming-of-age story about a generation of “good girls” who found ourselves in the revolutionary ’60s. But if our pioneering lawsuit has been forgotten by many people, even at Newsweek, our fight for women’s rights still reverberates with the younger generation. There have been many victories. Women today have more opportunities and solid legal support. They are more confident, more career-oriented, and more aggressive in getting what they want than most of us were. But many of the injustices that young women face today are the same ones we fought against forty years ago. The discrimination may be subtler, but sexist attitudes still exist.

Jessica, Jesse, and Sarah, and many young women like them, are beginning to understand that legal principles are not the only impediment to power. They see that the rhetoric they were taught—and believed—does not fully exist in the real world; that women still don’t have equal rights and equal opportunities; that cultural transformation is harder than legal reform; and that feminism isn’t finished. The struggle for social change is still evolving, and now they realize that they are part of it, too.

Here is our story.

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## CHAPTER 1

### “Editors File Story; Girls File Complaint”

ON MARCH 16, 1970, Newsweek magazine hit the newsstands with a cover story on the fledgling feminist movement titled “Women in Revolt.” The bright yellow cover pictured a naked woman in red silhouette, her head thrown back provocatively thrusting her fist through a broken blue female-sex symbol. As the first copies went on sale that Monday morning, forty-six female employees of Newsweek announced that we, too, were in revolt. We had just filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission charging that we had been “systematically discriminated against in both hiring and promotion and forced to assume a subsidiary role” simply because we were women. It was the first time women in the media had sued on the grounds of sex discrimination and the story, irresistibly timed to the Newsweek cover, was picked up around the world.

“‘Discriminate,’ le redattrici di Newsweek? ” (La Stampa)

“Newsweek’s Sex Revolt” (London Times)

“Editors File Story; Girls File Complaint” (Newsday)

“Women Get Set for Battle” (London Daily Express)

“As Newsweek Says, Women Are in Revolt, Even on Newsweek” (New York Times)

The story in the New York Daily News, titled “Newshens Sue Newsweek for ‘Equal Rights,’” began, “Forty-six women on the staff of Newsweek magazine, most of them young and most of them pretty, announced today they were suing the magazine.”

The UPI photograph capturing the announcement shows three young white women sitting alongside our attorney, a serious black woman with an imposing Afro. Behind them are pictured several rows of women in their twenties; I am shown standing in the corner with long dark hair. At 10 A.M. our lawyer, Eleanor Holmes Norton, the assistant legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union, began reading a statement to a packed press conference at the ACLU’s office at 156 Fifth Avenue. “It is ironic,” she said, waving a copy of the magazine, “that while Newsweek considers women’s grievances newsworthy enough for such major coverage, it continues to maintain a policy of discrimination against the women on its own staff. . . . The statistics speak for themselves—there are more than fifty men writing at Newsweek, but only one woman.” She pointed out that although the women were graduates of top colleges, held advanced degrees, and had published in major news journals, “Newsweek’s caste system relegated



women with such credentials to research jobs almost exclusively and interminably.”

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Eleanor noted that a copy of the complaint had gone to Katharine Graham, publisher of the Washington Post and president of the Washington Post Company, which owned Newsweek. “The Newsweek women believe that as a woman, Mr. Graham has a particular responsibility to end discrimination against women at her magazine,” she said. She called on Mrs. Graham and the editors to negotiate and asked for “the immediate integration of the research staff and the opening of correspondence, writing, and editing positions to women.”

Then she opened the floor to questions for the three Newsweek women at the table. One reporter asked who was the top woman at the magazine. Lucy Howard, a researcher in the National Affairs department, replied that it was Olga Barbo, who was head of the researchers and had been at Newsweek for forty years—which got a big laugh. Then Gabe Pressman, the veteran investigative reporter for local WNBC-TV, pushed his microphone in front of Mary Pleshette, the Movie researcher, and asked whether the discrimination was overt. “Yes,” she answered. “There seems to be a gentleman’s agreement at Newsweek that men are writers and women are researchers and the exceptions are few and far between.”

It was an exhilarating moment for us, and a shocking one for Newsweek editors, who couldn’t have been more surprised if their own daughters had risen up in revolt. We had been secretly strategizing for months, whispering behind closed doors, congregating in the Newsweek ladies’ room, and meeting in our apartments at night. As our numbers increased, we had hired a lawyer and were just reviewing our options when we were suddenly presented with a truly lucky break. In early 1970, Newsweek’s editors decided that the new women’s liberation movement deserved a cover story. There was one problem, however: there were no women to write the piece.

I was the only female writer on the magazine at the time, but I was very junior. As a researcher at Newsweek, I had also done a lot of reporting, and my editor in the Life & Leisure department had liked my work. When he decided that he didn’t want to write about fashion anymore, he suggested that I be promoted to do it, and in mid-1969, I was. In addition to fashion, I wrote about social trends, including the gay-rights and women’s movements. But things weren’t going well. The senior editor who promoted me had moved to another department and the new editor thought my stories were too sympathetic to the activists. My copy was often rewritten.

When the idea of doing a women’s lib cover was proposed in early 1970, the editors were savvy enough to realize they couldn’t have a man write the story. Though I was not experienced enough to tackle a cover story, another woman on the magazine could have written it: Liz Peer, a gifted reporter in Newsweek’s Washington bureau. But the editors never reached out to her. (When I asked my editor why they hadn’t asked Liz, he told me that although she had been a writer in New York and a foreign correspondent for five years, he “wasn’t sure” she could write a Newsweek cover.)

Instead, for the first time in the history of the magazine, the editors went outside the staff and hired Helen Dudar, a star writer at the New York Post, to do the piece. (Helen's husband, Peter Goldman, was a top writer for Newsweek.) That galvanized us. Our case might take years to wind its way through the EEOC backlog, but announcing our lawsuit the morning the "Women in Revolt" cover came out would get us prominent press coverage. We knew that worse than being sued, the publicity would mortify the magazine's editors, who prided themselves on the progressive views and pro-civil rights coverage that put Newsweek on the map in the 1960s.

The Sunday night before the press conference, we gathered at Holly Camp West Eighty-Third Street apartment to prepare for the historic day ahead. We were nervous, excited, and resolute. I felt especially happy for my close friend Judy Gingold, the conscience of our collective. Judy had been the first one to see our situation at Newsweek as a moral issue, and against the grain of her good-girl up-bringing, she had pushed us to file a lawsuit. First on our agenda was deciding who would speak at the press conference. Silence. No one wanted to do it. Pat Lynden, a reporter in the New York bureau who never shied from confrontation, finally said, "I'll do it with someone else." Lucy Howard, a good friend of Pat's, stepped up. "I thought if I don't do this, the whole lawsuit will go down the drain," she recalled. "It never occurred to me that I would have to answer a question. I just assumed I would be a warm body and that Eleanor would speak." Then Mary Pleshette proposed that I join them, but I demurred. "As someone who has become a writer, I don't think I should represent the class," I said, throwing the ball back to her. "Mary, why don't you do it?" Mary, always the first to raise her hand in class, said she would be willing to do it as long as everyone agreed, which they did.

The three spokeswomen moved to a corner to practice answers and to discuss what they would wear (Lucy decided on a pink John Kloss dress, Pat a rose-colored T Jones dress, and Mary a burnt-orange shift). Another group formed to write a release about the Monday press conference, which Susan Agrest's husband would drop off later that night at various news organizations to get the event on their daybooks. The rest of us, with our lawyer's help, drafted a letter to Katharine Graham informing her that we were about to file the suit. "We are writing to you," the letter said, "because we cannot believe that you are fully aware of the extent to which we are discriminated against at Newsweek." Then we all chipped in to fly Sunde Smith, a twenty-three-year-old Business researcher to Washington the next day because she still qualified for the \$17 student fare on the Eastern Airlines shuttle. Sunde, who had to get back to work Monday morning, was to hand the letter to a friend of Lucy's, who would deliver it to Katharine Graham at her stately Georgetown home.

The top editors were off on Mondays, having put the magazine to bed Saturday night, so we had to find someone to deliver a similar notice to Newsweek's editor-in-chief, Osborn "Oz" Elliott. None of us wanted to confront our fearsome leader at the door of his East Seventy-Second Street town house. I volunteered my husband, who relished the task. As we carefully choreographed our insurrection,

several women were still arguing that we should first go to management with our grievances. Others were filled with dread. "When I got home that night," recalled Lucy Howard, "I sat sobbing in the bathtub and thinking my eyes were going to be all puffy tomorrow. I was feeling I have to do this—but I can't."

We were hardly radical women. Nine days earlier, on March 6, five members of the Weatherman Underground had accidentally blown up a town house on West Eleventh Street as they were assembling bombs in the basement, killing two men and a woman—all in their twenties. Even in the media, there were far more outrageous actions than ours. Several weeks before our suit, freelance writer Susan Brownmiller convinced the newly formed Women's Media Group to hold a sit-in at one of the major women's magazines. Except for Helen Gurley Brown's *Cosmopolitan*, which promoted sexual liberation (mostly to please men), the other leading women's publications, all edited by men, were still preaching *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*, the German maxim for "children, kitchen, and church." The protestors decided to target the *Ladies' Home Journal*, whose slogan, "Never underestimate the power of a woman," took on new meaning two days after we filed our complaint. On March 18, more than one hundred members of various women's lib groups gathered at the Journal building at 9:15 A.M. and filed up to the fifth-floor corner office of John Mack Carter.

In his career, Carter had edited the big three women's magazines: *Good Housekeeping*, *McCall's*, and *Ladies' Home Journal*. A small, Southern, courtly gentleman, Carter was stunned as the brigade of women barged into his office. The protestors immediately began reading a list of demands, including hiring on more female staffers—and a female editor-in-chief—providing free on-site day care, ceasing to publish advertisements that degraded women, and turning over the editorial content of one issue to the women, to be named the *Women's Liberator Journal*. Cornered at his desk for more than eleven hours, Carter was silent while various women spoke to him about their lives, their aspirations, and their frustrations. Elsewhere on the floor, protestors engaged secretaries and editorial assistants in earnest conversations. Only Lenore Hershey, Carter's deputy editor, spoke up. "She was a tiger at the gate, a bear guarding her cub, a magpie passing judgment on our clothes, our hair, our extremely rude manners," wrote Brownmiller in her memoir. "Sisterhood failed us badly with Lenore Hershey. I got the feeling that even Carter wished she'd just shut up and listen."

At one point, Shulamith Firestone, leader of the New York Radical Feminists, jumped onto Carter's desk screaming, "I've had enough of this," and lunged at him. One of the radicals who had taken judo grabbed Firestone's arm and flipped her into the crowd. After that, according to Brownmiller, Carter started negotiating with the women. In the end, the *Journal* agreed "to explore" opening a day-care center and to turn over eight pages in the August issue to the protestors, paying them \$10,000.

Compared to that kind of guerrilla action, we were models of propriety. We didn't want to overthrow the system. We were proud to be part of a powerful and liberal institution like *Newsweek*; we wanted to transform it to make it better for women. In the 1960s, feminists had scored several important legal victories

including the 1963 Equal Pay Act, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and in 1967, a executive order that prohibited sex discrimination in hiring and promotion by federal contractors. In the 1970s, female journalists would declare war on the newsrooms and protest how women were covered in the media—and we were the first to challenge the industry's sexist policies. "The Newsweek case was pathbreaking in terms of impact on the law and on society," Eleanor Holme Norton told me. "It encouraged other women to come forward, it had an effect on journalism, and it had a wide-ranging effect on women. Journalists had to write about it, and because the women were so extraordinary, because the case was so clearly one of blatant, unmitigated discrimination, it made people understand discrimination against women in an important way."

Two months after we filed our complaint, ninety-six women at Time Inc. would file a sex discrimination complaint against Time, Life, Fortune, and Sports Illustrated. In the next few years, women sued their employers at the Reader Digest, Newsday, the Washington Post, the Detroit News, the Baltimore Sun, the New Haven Register, and the Associated Press. In 1974, six women at the New York Times—represented by one of our lawyers—filed sex discrimination charges on behalf of 550 women and in 1975, sixteen women at NBC initiated a class action lawsuit covering 2,600 present and past employees. "When women with staff jobs in the media began to rise up, feminism moved into another dimension," said Brownmiller. "Their courageous actions were to change the face of journalism forever."

In the end, it turned out that our extraordinary efforts to reach Katharine Graham that Monday in March were for naught. She was on vacation in the Bahamas. When Oz Elliott and Newsweek chairman Frederick "Fritz" Beebe telephoned her later that morning to tell her about the women's lawsuit, she was flummoxed. "Which side am I supposed to be on?" she asked them.

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LIKE KATHARINE GRAHAM, we all were confused. We were women in transition, raised in one era and coming of age in another, very different time. It is hard for people today, even many women, to comprehend the social order that prevailed in the roughly two decades after World War II. The 1940s and 1950s were a period of growing prosperity, incipient suburban sprawl, and a baby boom that kept our mothers fully occupied. Jim Crow was nearly everywhere, gays were strictly closeted, and a woman's place was in the home, at least after marriage and children. In those rare instances when women were hired for jobs usually held by men, they generally earned a lot less and often were treated as sexual fodder.

"We were the tail end of the old generation," explained personal finance columnist Jane Bryant Quinn, who worked briefly at Newsweek in the early 1960s. "We wore hats and gloves. We couldn't go to proms and parties without dates—and the men had to do the asking. We also didn't have many role models in the

working world.” Most of us had graduated from college in the '60s, when half of our classmates earned their “M-R-S” and got married when they graduated in June. “Our generation was raised to be attractive and smart—but not too smart,” said Pat Lynden. “We were to be deferential to men, to get married, raise children, and be ornamental wives dedicated to our husbands’ careers.”

Yet here we were, entering the workplace in the 1960s questioning—and often rejecting—many of the values we had been taught. We were the polite, perfectionist “good girls,” who never showed our drive or our desires around men. Now we were becoming mad women, discovering and confronting our own ambitions, a quality praised in men but stigmatized—still—in women. In her insightful book, *Necessary Dreams: Ambition in Women’s Changing Lives*, psychiatrist Anna Fels described the two emotional engines of ambition: the mastery of specific skills and the necessary recognition of that mastery by other people. Even today, she told me, as women have developed skills and expertise, they are “subtly discouraged from pursuing their goals by a pervasive lack of recognition for their accomplishments.” Women fear that seeking recognition will expose them to attacks on everything from their popularity to their femininity. But recognition in all its forms—admiration from peers, mentoring, institutional rewards, and societal approval—is something that makes us better at what we do. Fels explained, and without it “people get demoralized and ambitions erode.”

In January 2012, Sheryl Sandberg, chief operating officer of Facebook, spoke about an “ambition gap” at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. She noted that ever since the 1980s, women have progressed at every level except at the top, where, in the past ten years, they’ve leveled off at 15 percent to 16 percent of executive jobs and board representation. “We don’t raise our daughters to be as ambitious as our sons,” she said. One reason, she noted, was that “success and likeability are positively correlated for men and negatively correlated for women. As a man gets more powerful and successful, he is better liked. As a woman gets more powerful and successful, she is less liked.”

What led to our revolt? Why did our generation suddenly realize that our place in society was changing—and had to change? In part, we were carried by the social and political currents of our time. The civil rights movement was forcing a national conversation about equality and providing a model for all the protest movements of the 1960s. The music revolution was empowering a new “youth generation,” which in turn was creating a “youthquake” in art and fashion. And over it all, like an ominous shadow, the war in Vietnam was fostering a deep skepticism—and cynicism—toward authority.

For women, especially young, white, middle-class, college-educated women, the booming postwar economy provided new opportunities and jobs far more interesting than the tedious suburban lives of our mothers. The birth-control pill, which went on sale in 1960, allowed us to control our destinies while the sexual revolution gave us permission to explore our desires. All that fueled a women’s movement that questioned how we wanted to live our lives. As Gail Collins wrote in *When Everything Changed*, her 2009 history of American women from 1960 to the present, “It was, all in all, a benevolent version of the perfect storm.”

But even with the social winds in our sails and the women's movement behind us, each of us had to overcome deeply held values and traditional social strictures. The struggle was personally painful and professionally scary. What would happen to us? Would we win our case? Would we change the magazine? Or would we be punished? Who would succeed and who would not? And if our revolt failed, were our careers over—or were they over anyway? We knew that filing the suit legally protected us from being fired, but we didn't trust the editors not to find some way to do us in.

Whatever happened, the immediate result is that it put us all on the line. "The night after the press conference I realized there was no turning back," said Luc Howard. "Once I stepped up and said I wanted to be a writer, it was over. I wanted to change Newsweek, but everything was going to change."

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## CHAPTER 2

### “A Newsmagazine Tradition”

WHEN NEWSWEEK’S EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, Osborn “Oz” Elliott, responded to our lawsuit that Monday in March, he released a statement that served only to confirm the institutional sexism of the magazine. “The fact that most researchers at Newsweek are women and that virtually all writers are men,” it said, “stem from a newsmagazine tradition going back almost fifty years.”

That was true—and most of us never questioned it. Although we held impressive degrees from top colleges, we were just happy to land a job—even a menial one—at an interesting place. Saying you worked at Newsweek was glamorous compared to most jobs available to college-educated women. Classified ads were still segregated by gender and the listings under “Help Wanted—Female” were mainly for secretaries, nurses, and teachers or for training programs at banks and department stores such as Bloomingdale’s (that wouldn’t change until 1973, when the US Supreme Court ruled sex-segregated ads were illegal). But compared to jobs at newspapers, where women were reporters and editors—even if they were ghettoized in the “women’s pages”—the situation for women at the newsmagazines was uniquely injurious. We were confined to a category created especially for us and from which we rarely got promoted. Not only was research and fact-checking considered women’s work, but it was assumed that we didn’t have the talent or capability to go beyond it.

That infamous “tradition” began in 1923, when Henry Luce and Brit Hadden founded *Time*, *The Weekly News-Magazine*. Positioning their publication between the daily newspapers, which printed everything, and the weekly reviews, which were filled with lengthy commentary, these two young Yalies decided to create a conservative, compartmentalized digest of the week’s news that could be consumed in less than an hour. But although *Time* would give both sides of the issues, it would, they said in their prospective, clearly indicate “which side believes to have the stronger position.” In the beginning, the magazine was written by a small group of their Ivy League friends, who distilled stories from newspapers and wrote them, echoing Hadden’s beloved *Iliad*, in a hyphenated news-speak (“fleet-footed Achilles”) and a backward-running sentence structure (“Up to the White House portico rolled a borrowed automobile”). *Time* didn’t hire “stringer correspondents” until the 1930s, when the magazine decided to add original reporting.

But from the very beginning, the editorial staff included “girls” known as “checkers,” who verified names, dates, and facts. Thus was created a unique group-journalism model, which, unlike newspapers, separated all the editorial

functions: the reporters sent in long, colorful files from the field; the writers compiled the information and wrote the story in the omniscient, Lucean Voice of God; and the researchers checked the facts. Only “lady assistants” were hired as fact checkers, which, according to Oz Elliott, who worked at Time for six and a half years, was a “liberating thing for young fledgling women out of college because they could get into publishing without being stenographers or secretaries.”

Years later, the honorific of “checker” was upgraded to “researcher.” At Time’s twentieth anniversary dinner in 1943, Luce explained that although “the word ‘researcher’ is now a nation-wide symbol of serious endeavor,” the title was originally conceived when he and Hadden were doing some “research” for a drinking club called the Yale Professors. “Little did we realize,” he said, “that in our private jest we were inaugurating a modern female priesthood, the veritable vestal virgins whom leivitous writers cajole in vain, and managing editors learn humbly to appease.”

When News-Week began in 1933, it copied Time’s “tradition” of separating editorial functions. But at Newsweek (which joined its name in 1937 when it merged with the weekly journal Today), women didn’t even start as researchers—we were hired two rungs below that—on the mail desk. At Time, office boys delivered the mail and relevant newspaper clippings. But at Newsweek only girls with college degrees—and we were called “girls” then—were hired to sort and deliver the mail, humbly pushing our carts from door to door in our ladylike frocks and proper high-heeled shoes. If we could manage that, we graduated to “clippers,” another female ghetto. Dressed in drab khaki smocks so that we wouldn’t smudge our clothes, we sat at the clip desk, marked up newspapers, tore out relevant articles with razor-edged “rip sticks,” and routed the clips to the appropriate departments. “Being a clipper was a horrible job,” said writer and director Nora Ephron, who got a job at Newsweek after she graduated from Wellesley in 1962, “and to make matters worse, I was good at it.”

We were all good at it—that was our mind-set. We were willing to start at the bottom if it led to something better, and in most cases, it did: to the glorified position of researcher. Working side by side with the writers, we were now part of the news process, patrolling the AP and UPI telexes for breaking news, researching background material in the library, chatting with the guys about the stories, and on closing nights, fact-checking the articles. The wires were clacking, the phones were ringing, and we were engaged in lively conversations about things that mattered. It was thrilling to feel the pulse of the news and to have that special pipeline to the truth that civilians couldn’t possibly have. “It was everything you wouldn’t think of growing up in Marion, Pennsylvania,” said Franny Heller Zorn, who still remembered the thrill of finding the first wire report about a breaking news event, in her case when Adlai Stevenson collapsed on a sidewalk in London and died later that day. “The guys were great, the women were terrific, and everyone was smart. It was a privilege to be part of the Newsweek culture and to have that job, even with all the crap we had to do.”

Our primary job was to fact-check the stories and that meant checking near



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