

Television Review: *Good Girls Revolt* Offers Teaching Examples, Discussion Props

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*Good Girls Revolt, Season 1.* Amazon Studios, 2015–2016.

If you struggle to explain magazines' golden age to the digital natives in your classroom, there is no better place to start than *Good Girls Revolt*, an Amazon-original series whose 2015 pilot was followed by the premiere of its first season in October. Set in the late 1960s in the offices of *News of the Week*, a thinly veiled reference to *Newsweek*, the show's first 10 episodes are full of poignant examples that encapsulate the abstract dilemmas of magazine editing, writing, design, and management.

Based on Linda Povich's 2012 book *The Good Girls Revolt: How the Women of Newsweek Sued Their Bosses and Changed the Workplace*, the show is part a women's rights manifesto and part a nostalgic trip down memory lane. For those of us who entered journalism believing that publishing a story was synonymous with printing it, the series conjures embodied memories of the adrenaline-fueled world of analog newsrooms. In it, stories are one-time shots that cannot be updated online. Deadlines are real. Typewriters clack and ding, the telex machine hammers, landlines ring off the hook, and reporters furiously take notes by hand as they cradle phone receivers to their ears. One can almost sense the mimeograph ink's retro scent wafting from behind the screen.

There's the incessant thrill of scooping *Time* and the national newspapers. There's the struggle to keep breaking news "sexy" and avoid writing "like an AP reporter." There's the ruthless editing process ("They asked me to deliver the body," says a messenger who drops off a marked copy on a reporter's desk). There's the ongoing rivalry with *The New Yorker*, whose editor calls to say he found only two typos in last week's issue. And there's walking the fine line between satisfied subscribers and booming newsstand sales.

The portrayal of what staffers call the "sausage factory" is also true to the linguistic reality of most newsrooms. Profanities and vulgarities, both literal and figurative, fly all the time ("It's gonna be tight sphincters in a lot of editors' offices before this thing's over"). The verbal filth, however, hides a deeply held veneration for the beauty and richness of the English language. As characters sometimes revel in rarely used words, like "tumescence" and "peregrination," viewers are reminded that knowledge of GRE vocabulary is necessary but not sufficient for linguistic mastery. A picture is not required to accompany a story at *News of the Week*, but good writing is non-negotiable.

Looking to illustrate American magazines' anti-intellectual slant? Check out the first episode, in which, after a heated debate about the choice of a cover story, the national editor cautions the managing editor: "You're jerking yourself off with some intellectual debate about cultural coverage."

Seeking to demonstrate the precarious balance between facts and opinion in magazine writing, or the self-analytical struggle that plagues journalists' psyches? Look no further than the

tension between Wick McFadden, who declares “I am here as a newsman,” and his boss Finn Woodhouse, who thinks “we’re opinionated sons of bitches who get bored easily.”

The show also features an array of scenes that teachers of journalism will recognize as ethical dilemmas, and the characters are complex enough to demonstrate real-world inconsistency in the ways they navigate these scenarios. The managing editor accepts free airline tickets for the first direct flight from New York to London “in exchange for a story.” Yet the same man is furious when a subordinate promises favorable coverage in exchange for ad buys. He is condescending while talking to a reader complaining about potential libel yet obsessed with serving the public interest with a feature about the unprovoked murder of 500 Vietnamese civilians.

Ethical inconsistencies trickle down the ranks, too. During a mail strike, reporters take on delivering letters to people as an exploitative way to obtain quotes. Yet, when one woman receives a letter from Vietnam, a reporter sensitively walks away: “When you grow up around that kind of pain, you can’t fix it, you can’t make them forget it, you can’t take it away from them. All you can do is treat it with respect.”

The ultimate irony of the show’s first season will not be lost to journalism educators. As *News of the Week* editors and writers doggedly pursue the “news” and righteously embrace their non-existing objectivity, they fail to see both the injustice (gender disparity) and the story (an EEOC complaint filed by female researchers) in their own newsroom. Although *Good Girls Revolt* lacks the nuance and subtlety of *Mad Men*, it is nevertheless an entertaining and thought-provoking visual feast for journalism teachers, scholars, and students alike.