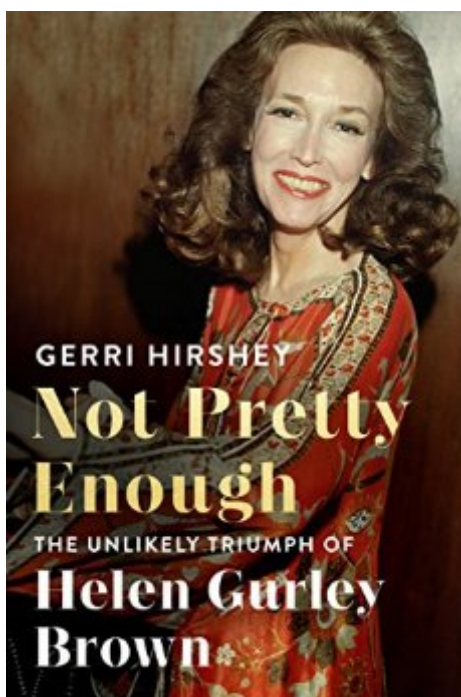


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# Not Pretty Enough: The Unlikely Triumph Of Helen Gurley Brown



## Synopsis

When Helen Gurley Brown's *Sex and the Single Girl* first appeared in 1962, it whistled into buttoned-down America like a bombshell: Brown declared that it was okay "even imperative" for unmarried women to have and enjoy a sex life, and that equal rights for women should extend to the bedroom and the workplace. "How dare you?" thundered newspapers, radio hosts, and (mostly male) citizens. But more than two million women bought the book and hailed her as a heroine. Brown was also pilloried as a scarlet woman and a traitor to the women's movement when she took over the failing Hearst magazine *Cosmopolitan* and turned it into a fizzy pink guidebook for "do-me" feminism. As the first magazine geared to the rising wave of single working women, it sold wildly. Today, more than 68 million young women worldwide are still reading some form of Helen Gurley Brown's audacious yet comforting brand of self-help. HGB "wasn't the ideal poster girl for secondwave feminism, but she certainly started the conversation. Brown campaigned for women's reproductive freedom and advocated skill and "brazenry" both on the job and in the boudoir "along with serial plastic surgery. When she died in 2012, her front-page obituary in *The New York Times* noted that though she succumbed at ninety, "parts of her were considerably younger." Her life story is astonishing, from her roots in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas, to her single-girl decade as a *Mad Men* era copywriter in Los Angeles, which informed her first bestseller, to her years at the helm of *Cosmopolitan*. Helen Gurley Brown told her own story many times, but coyly, with plenty of camouflage. Here, for the first time, is the unvarnished and decoded truth about "how she did it" "from her comet-like career to "bagging" her husband of half a century, the movie producer David Brown. Full of firsthand accounts of HGB from many of her closest friends and rediscovered, little-known interviews with the woman herself, Gerri Hirshey's *Not Pretty Enough* is a vital biography that shines new light on the life of one of the most vibrant, vexing, and indelible women of the twentieth century.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As a young woman I regularly read Helen Gurley Brown's Cosmopolitan magazine. At least until the bulk, the very energy of the mag became almost overwhelming. But that was the effect HGB had on American culture. I thought I knew about the tiny woman from Arkansas (though I guess I never realized how tiny she was); now that I've read Gerri Hirshey's exhaustively researched book, I understand so much more, about the era and about HGB! Yes, she was relentless, but she remained true to her self-assigned role as the woman out there who would understand your aspirations to have it all--the interesting career, the man (though she didn't much care for the usual "children" part of that trinity; the "mouseburger" who through her magazine could pump you up enough to get what every woman deserves! And what was that? As Gerri Hirshey says, It was good men! Great jobs! Better posture! Cheaper car insurance! This is a great read!

Don't hurt yourself trying to locate Helen Gurley Brown's place in the history of 20th Century feminism--that can be a twisty and painful exercise--and just enjoy Gerri Hirshey's lively, vividly detailed biography of a picaresque and utterly original American life. Readers of a certain age who may have filed away the writer of "Sex and the Single Girl" and creator of Cosmopolitan magazine (as we now know it) as a daffy, fishnets-and-Pucci-clad 70s media icon/caricature will find much more to consider here. Hirshey digs into Brown's difficult and deprived early life in Arkansas; her hard-earned breakthroughs in the Mad Men era advertising business; her culturally galvanizing notion that "spinster" was a ludicrously outmoded way to define a single woman by the dawn of the 60s; her long and happy marriage to producer David Brown, which was also an extremely successful working partnership. Younger readers may not know her name, but they exist in a

popular culture shaped, to some extent, by HGB. So whether they find themselves amused or appalled by her style, methods and beliefs--there's room for both reactions here--they will encounter a psychologically complex woman of epic grit and relatability (who among us hasn't felt "not pretty enough"?), well worth getting to know.

As a young writer and editor in NYC, HGB was always kind of a mythical figure to me. My former editor Steve Birnbaum talking about her brilliance only enhanced the fairy tale. I was introduced to her once at Le Cirque where she and David Brown were seated at the restaurant's front and favored table. Gerri Hirshey's great new book reveals her as a woman of that era we can identify with. I remember asking a friend of mine, who was then the editor of American Photographer, to help me write witty captions!!

This book is so much fun. I grew up reading Cosmo in the '80s and ultimately moved to New York because I dreamed of working in women's magazines just like HGB. Readers who toiled in the New York publishing world in the 70s, 80s and 90s will recognize the many famous names and places in Hirshey's narrative. But even if you're not a media person, there's plenty to like in this nostalgic trip through the last half of the 20th Century. It's all there--the women's movement, the sexual revolution, midcentury home decor, the horror of AIDS, the birth of the modern new-age wellness movement, the rise of cosmetic surgery...all through the eyes of a glamorous everywoman. Could not have enjoyed it more.

Gerri Hirshey obviously spent a lot of time learning who Helen Gurley Brown was, and quite a feat since, ironically her employer didn't want to help. A great read about a courageous woman and a great reminder that women still have a long way to go.

When you're hooked on a book from just the preface and prologue pages, you know it's going to be good. Not disappointed. Well-researched & superbly written. Highly recommended!

Gerri Hirshey deserves a dozen stars for this bio of Helen Gurley Brown. It's impossible to put down until you've read single word. No question HGB was indeed unique and the author does her justice. No reader could help but wonder at the life she came from, then created and led! Her story may shock some but it's a story that is utterly fascinating. I can't imagine there could ever be another HGB!

As biographies go, this was a great read - the author's style manages to convey the essence of Gurley-Brown's personality with her breezy style of writing. I knocked off the extra stars due to the lack of photos in the Kindle version - a shameful omission considering the price.

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