

# MISSING:

INFORMATION ABOUT WOMEN'S LIVES

A REPORT  
FROM THE  
NATIONAL COUNCIL  
FOR RESEARCH  
ON WOMEN

THE NATIONAL  
COUNCIL FOR  
RESEARCH  
ON WOMEN

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**The National Council for Research on Women is an alliance of 100 leading US and international women's research and policy centers. The Council uses research as a tool for progressive social change. We promote scholarship on issues significant to women and girls; foster collaboration across borders of gender, race, nationality, sexual orientation, class, and generation; and influence public debate through accurate information and analysis.**

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# Keeping Women Visible

**T**he National Council for Research on Women comprises 100 leading US women's research, policy, and education centers, with a growing international reach. This report speaks to the Council's newly formed Chamberlain Initiative, designed to expand the impact of women's research on public thinking, debate, and policy. Through this initiative, named for our founding president, Mariam Chamberlain, the Council will marshal the resources and strength of its member centers to foster strategic action based on expert knowledge and analysis and ensure that the policies that govern the way we live are driven by balanced, evidence-based research.

The report concentrates on missing information – information that directly affects women's lives. Vital data have been deleted, buried, altered, or otherwise gone missing from government websites and publications: priorities have changed, funding cut, research findings distorted, important social differences masked, critical committees and programs dismantled.

Taken cumulatively, these actions are serious for women and girls and must be addressed. As the report shows, such distortions and omissions have debilitating consequences for peoples' health and livelihoods. They also deny researchers critical facts and impede our ability to craft solutions and develop strategies to address the pressing challenges of our times.

Americans share a proud legacy of trusting the federal government to assemble information needed to advance women's rights and status. As data on women disappear, an important and non-partisan tradition of government is being destroyed.

The National Council for Research on Women joins a growing chorus of researchers, scientific experts, policymakers, and journalists in a call to concerned citizens to protest and reverse decisions that diminish the amount and quality of information available to us all. These decisions, we believe, cannot be left unchecked.

I hope you will join our effort.

**Linda Basch**  
**President**  
**National Council for Research on Women**

# Out of Sight, But Not Out of Mind

**N**ational researchers, policymakers, and the media have voiced major concerns about a pattern that diminishes the integrity of information available through government sources. Here's the story from the women's research and policy perspective.

Last year, people logged onto the Internet 236,942,931 times to ask the United States government for information they need to protect their health, advance their careers, care for and educate their families and communities, and better understand issues that affect their lives. Among those people were many researchers and advocates who use information from the government to understand trends and shape policy recommendations. Over the last four decades, these researchers and citizens, under both Republican and Democratic administrations, have been able to trust and depend on a vigorous flow of reliable data from federal agencies.

That is no longer true. As a network of 100 women's research, policy, and educational centers, the National Council for Research on Women is publishing this report to spotlight a disturbing pattern of decisions by federal agencies to close down, delay, alter, or spin data about what is happening to American women.

When data and analyses are obscured and/or regular reports withheld, women and girls – and women's research and policy centers – are left in the dark. As researchers, we know that clear, accurate data and comparative analyses are crucial to solving problems and achieving equality. Without accurate and timely publication by federal government agencies of unbiased and gender-disaggregated data – information that is broken down to show what is happening in the lives of both women and men – this becomes impossible. (See sidebar 1)

Missing or inaccurate information and politically or ideologically driven science have a cumulative effect on American women and diminish their potential contributions to families, communities, and the economy. Without accurate information, research suffers, women and girls suffer, our society suffers.

This report tells the story of excluded and missing information. But it is also a story of the loss of trust – trust that the facts posted on government agency websites or published in government documents are accurate and complete, and trust that critical information on health, employment, and violence against women will be easily available. (See sidebar 2) It is about data that are missing, withheld, incomplete, defunded, censored, unjustly challenged, or manipulated. It is about the dissolution of specialized offices, task forces, and committees that focused on women's needs and concerns, and the implication that these needs and concerns are not important to public policy and programs. (See sidebar 3)

"[I]nformation that is excluded in making societal choices is as important as information that is included. When information is excluded, either deliberately or through indifference, policy choices are skewed at the expense of freedom and justice for all."

**MARTHA FARNSWORTH RICHE**  
*Former Director of the  
 US Census Bureau*

## SIDEBAR 1

### NECESSARY DATA

*Having gender-disaggregated data available makes a difference in women's lives. Here's how:*

#### Health

A radical shift in the treatment of heart disease took place after HHS was pressured by the Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues, among other groups, to have clinical trials done on women. Prior to that time it was assumed that trials on men sufficed. Today we know that heart disease is the number 1 killer of women – and only because we looked at differences between women and men as well as ethnic and racial differences, do we understand the kinds of education, prevention, screening and treatment that are needed to keep all women, as well as all men, healthy.

#### Entrepreneurship

Women business owners felt that tradition and discrimination closed doors to government contracts and to the capital they needed, but no one knew the facts. It took advocacy to press the Census Bureau to collect, regularly analyze, and publicly release data on women-owned business. In spite of the fact that half of all businesses in this country will soon be women-owned, women entrepreneurs still find barriers. Those barriers will fall faster as the prevalence of women's businesses becomes more visible.

#### Poverty

The collection of gender-disaggregated data internationally has led to a deep understanding of the urgency of educating girls as well as boys. It is key to assuring women's full political and economic participation to alleviate poverty. It is also key in steps to improve the governance and economies of countries around the world. The absence of gender-disaggregated data would jeopardize the possibilities for women – and men – along a number of fronts, at all socioeconomic levels.

As Martha Farnsworth Riche, former Director of the US Census Bureau, points out in the afterword to this report, “[I]nformation that is excluded in making societal choices is as important as information that is included. When information is excluded, either deliberately or through indifference, policy choices are skewed at the expense of freedom and justice for all.”

We challenge all governmental agencies to continue to provide the unbiased and transparent research, data, and information that all citizens deserve and that women need to raise healthy families, be active participants in our society, and work as productive employees and business owners in our economy. We challenge the government to assess the scope and quality of information it currently provides, and to make it easily available to policymakers, researchers, and individual women and men who need it. The Council will do its part by establishing the MisInformation Clearinghouse ([www.ncrw.org/misinfo.html](http://www.ncrw.org/misinfo.html)), an ongoing record of omissions, alterations, and distortions of vital information that was once readily available, and a repository of links to sites where good information can still be found.

“Without data on poverty that is disaggregated by gender, and ideally also by race/ethnicity, researchers and policy makers are impoverished in their ability to analyze and understand the social, economic, and political factors that promote economic hardship and insecurities. Moreover, given the dramatic shift in welfare policy in recent years, we need gender-disaggregated data to track and analyze the effects of social policy on the well-being of our nation's most vulnerable families.”

**SANDRA MORGEN**

**Director of the Center for the Study of Women  
in Society at the University of Oregon  
(NCRW Member Center)**

**SIDEBAR 2****DESTROYING A PROUD NON-PARTISAN LEGACY**

For over four decades the American public has trusted the federal government to marshal information needed to advance women's rights and status. These efforts would not have progressed without leadership from Democratic and Republican administrations alike and the unimpeded flow of dependable information between government agencies and scholars and advocates for women:

**1961**

President John F. Kennedy establishes the Commission on the Status of Women to recommend ways to overcome barriers to women's full participation as citizens. Individuals who work on the Commission draw on data developed by the Labor Department to establish academic and public policy research centers and found national organizations such as WEAL and NOW to advance the Commission's recommendations.

**1974**

President Gerald Ford launches an initiative that invigorates efforts to root out remaining discriminatory barriers. The National Commission on the Observation of International Women's Year sets out "to promote equality between men and women." The research and surveys presented by the commission lead to an ambitious Plan of Action developed by the First National Women's Conference in Houston in November 1977.

**1995**

The United States joins 188 other governments in Beijing to adopt a Platform for Action on women's rights and public policy in 12 critical areas of concern at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women. President Bill Clinton appoints a high-level President's Interagency Council on Women to implement those strategies in the United States. As part of its work, the Council produces *America's Commitment: Women 2000* which describes programs for women throughout the government, with contacts and names for easy access.

**2001**

The President's Interagency Council on Women is disbanded, as is the White House Office of Women's Initiatives and Outreach.

## Does Missing Information Really Have a Negative Effect on Women's Lives?

**DOES IT MATTER** that information routinely posted on government websites, such as critical health data for women, is withdrawn or altered without explanation?

**YES!** When scientific data on the effectiveness of condoms in preventing AIDS, for example, is called into question, lifesaving information is denied to the young women and men who need it most.

**DOES IT MATTER** that a major resource for working women, the Department of Labor's Women's Bureau, an agency charged by Congress with providing information on women's economic status and rights, is now nearly silent on those issues?

**YES!** Women lose the tools they need to know their rights in the workplace, advance their careers, and help support their families when helpful publications focused specifically on job rights are no longer available. A look at various public websites indicates that information accumulated over decades under both Republican and Democratic administrations, including a wide variety of helpful factsheets that analyze women's status and rights, is no longer available.

**DOES IT MATTER** that appointees to scientific advisory panels – like the Advisory Committee to the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or the FDA's Reproductive Health Drug Advisory Committee – appear to be chosen more for the ideological or economic interests they represent than for their scientific credentials?

**YES!** Advisors who lack the necessary background to evaluate issues undermine the balance and scientific objectivity of the information and analysis made available by the panels. When evidence-based research is jettisoned to make room for politically motivated suppositions, good public policy suffers.

**DOES IT MATTER** that agencies and councils that monitor governmental efforts on behalf of women and girls disappear, such as the President's Interagency Council on Women, with its mandate to develop policies for the advancement of women and girls under the UN Platform for Action adopted by the nations of the world in 1995 at Beijing?

**YES!** While rhetoric is easy, what matters to women both in this country and around the world are results, with the United States clearly fulfilling the commitments our government made to achieve women's equality at the UN Fourth World Conference.<sup>2</sup> (See sidebar 3)

"I'm not aware that [Nixon] ever hand-picked ideologues to serve on advisory committees, or dismissed from advisory committees very well-qualified people if he didn't like their views.... What's going on now is in many ways more insidious. It happens behind the curtain. I don't think we've had this kind of cynicism with respect to objective advice since I've been watching government, which is quite a long time."

**LEWIS BRANSCOMB**  
*Director of the National Bureau  
 of Standards under  
 President Nixon<sup>1</sup>*

## SIDEBAR 3

**DISBANDING OFFICES THAT HELP PROTECT WOMEN**

The President's Interagency Council on Women, chaired first by Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala and then by Secretary of State Madeline Albright, published reports in 1997 and 2000 entitled *America's Commitment*. These reports reviewed federal programs and initiatives for women as part of the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action agreed to by 189 nations of the world, including the United States, in 1995. By 2004, not only had the President's Interagency Council on Women and the White House Office for Women's Initiatives and Outreach been disbanded, but several federal programs and initiatives for women had disappeared from public view.

**DOES IT MATTER** that front-line offices designed to assure that the concerns of women are addressed in policy development, such as the Office of Women's Initiatives and Outreach in the White House, also disappear?

**YES!** In the absence of such offices, officials throughout the administration know that the White House is not focused on the need to take into account the often different impact that policies will have on women and men. Without these offices, public officials do not need to take into account women's lives nor assure that policies that govern women's lives and those of their families meet their needs.

**The focus of this report:  
health, employment, and violence against women**

With weekly headlines about suppressed information, slanted scientific panels, and altered research reports, the question for the National Council for Research on Women was where to begin to look at the quality and availability of government information and research for women. We chose to focus on three areas: health, jobs and the economy, and violence against women. Why these three? First, because a Lifetime poll released in January 2004 identified these issues as top concerns for women.<sup>3</sup> An earlier two-year survey by the Center for the Advancement of Women, *Progress and Perils: New Agenda for Women* (June 2003), identified the very same three priorities.<sup>4</sup> And finally, health, employment, and violence against women are three of the 12 critical areas of concern for women identified in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, through which the US government has agreed to implement strategies for women's and girls' equality and empowerment. This commitment included "efforts to gather and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for policy planning and evaluation" as a crucial baseline for policies and programs to create gender equity.

## Health: Raising Doubts

“Across a broad range of issues, the administration has undermined the quality of the scientific advisory systems and the morale of the government’s outstanding scientific personnel.”

**DR. KURT GOTTFRIED**  
**Chairman, Union of**  
**Concerned Scientists**<sup>6</sup>

**WHAT WOMEN EXPECT** American women want to know that the information they get from the federal government to help safeguard their health and that of their families is trustworthy: In the January 2004 Lifetime poll, 82% of women said a candidate’s position on women’s healthcare would have an impact on their vote. An equal share of women (83%) cited healthcare as a top priority in the *Progress and Perils* report.

**WHAT WOMEN FIND** A central government website ([www.4women.gov](http://www.4women.gov)) presents health information useful to individual women on important topics like heart disease, prevention of diabetes, safe pregnancy, breastfeeding, and menopause. There are links to government publications and those of other groups. However, in some important areas, like reproductive health, women take their chances with information from the federal government that can be incomplete, inconsistent with proven research, and, in some instances, contradictory to generally accepted medical practices.

“In my 25 years in the field, I have never seen such a climate of fear and intimidation in science. The United States government must advocate strongly on behalf of scientific research on sexuality. Our work is not just about disease prevention or sex acts. What is at stake is the urgent need for reliable data, not ideology, that helps all of us understand sexuality across the course of life – how love, pleasure, and intimate relationships support and sustain healthy individuals and families.”

**GILBERT HERDT**  
**Director of the National Sexuality**  
**Resource Center, San Francisco**  
**State University**<sup>7</sup>

### Spreading Misinformation

Over the years, in an effort to frighten women, especially young women, away from having abortions, anti-choice activists have publicized research findings suggesting that abortion might have some connection to breast cancer. In 1997, *The New England Journal of Medicine* published a conclusive study discrediting any such connection, and the National Cancer Institute (NCI) website reported this finding in a fact sheet.<sup>5</sup> But then in November 2002, contrary to this broad medical consensus, the fact sheet was changed to state that studies on the subject were inconsistent. After an outcry by members of Congress forced the convening of a panel of experts, the NCI posted the panel’s finding: abortion is not associated with an increased breast cancer risk.

## SIDEBAR 4

## SCIENTISTS SPEAK OUT

The nation's scientific community blew the whistle with a major statement and release of a report in February 2004, charging a "well-established pattern of suppression and distortion of scientific findings by high-ranking Bush Administration political appointees across numerous federal agencies." Citing reproductive health as one of the problem areas, the report said these actions "have consequences for human health, public safety, and community well-being."<sup>13</sup>

More than 60 scientists, including 20 Nobel laureates, issued the statement, which called for regulation and legislative action to restore scientific integrity to federal policy making. Prepared by the Union of Concerned Scientists, the 38-page report, *Scientific Integrity in Policymaking: An Investigation into the Bush Administration Misuse of Science*, documented distortions that support abstinence-only sex education programs and in information provided on the prevention of breast cancer and HIV/AIDS, among many other issues.

The report accused the administration of misrepresenting scientific consensus, suppressing reports by federal scientists, stacking advisory committees, and dismissing government panels that gave unwanted advice. According to the report, unqualified political appointees were appointed to panels advising policymakers on areas including reproductive health and childhood lead poisoning prevention.

Dr. John H. Marburger III, science adviser to President Bush and director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy at the White House, denied the accusations. "In most cases," he said, "these are not profound actions that were taken as the result of a policy. They are individual actions that are part of the normal processes within the agencies."<sup>14</sup>

On February 23, a *New York Times* editorial urged Dr. Marburger to reconsider.<sup>15</sup>

## Raising Doubts

In what Representative Henry Waxman (D-CA) has called "an Orwellian trend at HHS," information that used to be based on science is being systematically removed from the public.<sup>8</sup> Waxman noted how sex education information on a Health and Human Services (HHS) website has been distorted, and performance measures to test the effectiveness of abstinence programs have been altered, in order to make abstinence-only approaches to pregnancy prevention appear more successful than they have been otherwise proven to be.<sup>9</sup>

Despite research, the government is now unwilling to state that condom use is important to protect women against HIV and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) fact sheet that focused on the advantages of using a condom to prevent sexually transmitted diseases was revised in December 2002 to cast doubt on condom effectiveness, calling evidence on condom use and transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases "inconclusive." The new version focuses exclusively on abstinence, warning that "condom use cannot guarantee absolute protection against any STD." A straightforward guide to the correct use of condoms disappeared, as did a "Programs that Work" section, which listed successful comprehensive sex education programs and cited peer-reviewed studies that showed no increase or earlier occurrence of sexual activity among teens taught about condoms. Similar changes in information about condoms appeared on the US AID website.<sup>10</sup> On December 19, 2002, CDC's deputy director for science defended the actions in an AP/*Baltimore Sun* interview: "[T]his fact sheet is designed to be as scientifically accurate as possible. We specifically tried not to nuance it in the direction of either encouraging or discouraging use of condoms."<sup>11</sup>

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) in its 2004 report, *Scientific Integrity in Policymaking: An Investigation into the Bush Administration Misuse of Science*, charges that officials distorted the CDC's science-based performance measures to test the effectiveness of sex education programs in preventing unwanted pregnancies. (See sidebar 4) The usual measure for the effectiveness of such a program would be to chart the birthrates of female participants. But in its testing of abstinence-only programs, Health and Human Services "required the CDC to track only participants' program attendance and attitudes, measures designed to obscure the lack of efficacy of abstinence-only programs."<sup>12</sup>

## SIDEBAR 5

### GOVERNMENT ADMITS TO RELEASING INACCURATE DATA

On February 21, 2004, the government confessed that it improperly altered a report documenting large racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare. According to Health and Human Services Secretary Thompson, “some individuals took it upon themselves” to make the report sound more positive than was justified by the data.<sup>18</sup>

### Withholding Data

Of particular concern to women of color as well as to health professionals, the executive summary of the *National Healthcare Disparities Report*, a Congressionally mandated report card on racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in healthcare, was watered down and its conclusions underplayed. The original version of the report that was circulated by the HHS’s Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRC) told the accurate story of health disparities, including major inequities in diagnosing and treating such conditions as hypertension, diabetes, and HIV – all of enormous importance to the health of women of color. The original report emphasized that members of minorities “tend to be in poorer health than other Americans” and that “disparities are pervasive in our healthcare system,” contributing to higher rates of disease and disability.<sup>16</sup> In draft, the summary of the document, prepared by AHRC, cited disparities as “national problems that affect healthcare at all points in the process, at all sites of care, and for all medical conditions.”

But it was not released like that. Instead, the report’s executive summary was rewritten in a way that masked the problems. In the rewritten report, disparities are called “differences,” and the summary concludes, “There is no implication that these differences result in adverse health outcomes.” After strong public objection, the decision was reversed on February 11, 2004, and the report – with the accurate executive summary – has been published.<sup>17</sup> (See sidebar 5)

### Delaying Vital Health Information

The CDC now requires review and approval of all HIV health education materials by federal rather than local officials. In giving federal agencies responsibility for these materials, considered contentious by conservative forces, the CDC is delaying the delivery of important health information to people who need it and seems to be applying a political rather than an educational test to the materials. This change in policy makes programming less responsive to local needs, diminishes the quality and diversity of materials available to on-the-ground programs, and will inhibit cutting-edge HIV care and prevention, especially to high-risk, underserved populations.

“The federal government has an especially critical role to play in collecting and honestly analyzing data, supporting a more diverse health workforce, and ensuring enforcement of civil rights in the healthcare system. To avoid the truth, or cloak it in more comfortable words, is to abandon that responsibility.”

**DR. H. JACK GEIGER**

**Logan Professor Emeritus and former chair of Community and Social Medicine at the City University of New York and past president of Physicians for Human Rights<sup>19</sup>**

“The purpose of federal advisory committees is to review science objectively and make sound public policy recommendations. If these committees’ objectivity is diminished or their evaluations ignored, their value is greatly reduced and the country’s health and science policies will suffer.”

**PHYLLIS GREENBERGER**

**President and CEO, Society for Women’s Health Research (NCRW Member Center)**

### **Inhibiting Healthcare Providers**

New and intrusive reporting of services for women is having an impact on front-line service providers. The Title X funding appropriation bill for fiscal year 2004 allows the Health and Human Services department to collect the names of health providers that offer abortion services with their non-Title X dollars – the first step, providers fear, toward a domestic gag rule that would force them to choose between government support or withholding vital information from their patients. Also, in a lawsuit initiated by doctors protesting the abortion ban legislation of 2003, the Department of Justice subpoenaed the medical records of women, not party to the lawsuit, who have had procedures now criminalized under the ban.<sup>20</sup>

### **Censoring Researchers**

The compilation of a list by the right-wing Traditional Values Coalition of more than 150 researchers and 200 grants in the fields of high-risk sexual behavior, STDs, and adolescent sexual behavior has forced National Institutes of Health (NIH) officials to ask researchers to defend the public health benefits of their projects. “NIH has been put in the position frequently in the last year of having to re-justify research that has already been peer-reviewed, approved, and funded,” said Dr. Judith Auerbach, former head of the Office of AIDS Research at the NIH.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps as a cautionary action, federal health agency officials have pressured researchers to avoid certain buzzwords in grant applications, such as “gay,” “sex worker,” and “transgender.” Advocates fear that the chilling effect of such activity could lead to what Representative Waxman, in a letter to HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson, called “scientific McCarthyism.”<sup>22</sup>

“This delay is a politically transparent roadblock. There is no scientific reason to make women wait even one more day for this important method of contraception. Comprehensive scientific data shows that Plan B is safe and effective and meets the FDA’s criteria for over-the-counter status. The delay announced today proves that anti-choice ideology is trumping scientific fact – at the expense of women’s health.”

**GLORIA FELDT**

**President of Planned Parenthood Federation of America (NCRW Member Center)<sup>26</sup>**

### **Ideology Over Science**

Allowing women over-the-counter access to emergency contraceptives (the morning-after pill) is a “public health imperative,” according to testimony before a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advisory panel in December 2003. A 24-3 majority of the members agreed, as did a second scientific advisory committee. Both advised the FDA to sanction the medication (known as Plan B) as a non-prescription rather than prescription drug so that it could be widely available within the short window where it would prevent pregnancy. FDA Commissioner Mark B. McClellan was expected to announce his decision by February 20, 2004. But after the hearings, conservative groups renewed campaigns to block approval. On February 14, the FDA told the Plan B marketers that the agency was extending the deadline by 90 days.<sup>23</sup> So far in this case, political pressure seems to have blocked information that young women need to prevent unwanted pregnancies and diminish the need for abortions.

### **Stacking Scientific Panels**

Members of advisory and peer review panels have been chosen or excluded based on ideological stands rather than expertise:

In 2002, HHS Secretary Thompson dismissed three well-qualified experts on ergonomics from a National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) peer review panel. Two of the scientists, who had been nominated for service by the director of NIOSH, believe that they were denied positions because of their support for a workplace ergonomics standard. Dr. Laura Punnett, a University of Massachusetts professor who supports efforts to reduce musculoskeletal work injuries, including repetitive work injuries common to women, said of her dismissal, “I think it conveys very powerfully that part of the goal is to intimidate researchers and limit what research questions are asked.”<sup>24</sup>

Only extraordinary public outcry prevented the appointment of Dr. W. David Hager to chair the FDA’s Reproductive Health Drug Advisory Committee. Hager is known for prescribing prayer as a treatment for premenstrual syndrome and refusing to prescribe birth control pills to unmarried women. He remains a member of the committee.<sup>25</sup>

# Jobs and the Economy: Holding Back

## SIDEBAR 6

### CHANGING MISSIONS AT THE WOMEN'S BUREAU

#### Mission Statement, from 1999 archive:

Central to its mission is the responsibility to advocate and inform women directly and the public as well, of women's rights and employment issues... To ensure that the voices of working women are heard, and their priorities represented in the public policy arena, the Women's Bureau:

- > Alerts women about their rights in the workplace.
- > Proposes policies and legislation that benefit working women.
- > Researches and analyzes information about women and work.
- > Makes appropriate reports on its findings.

#### Mission Statement, as of Feb. 10, 2004:

To promote profitable employment opportunities for women, to empower them by enhancing their skills and improving their working conditions, and to provide employers with more alternatives to meet their labor needs.

*Vision Statement* We will empower women to enhance their potential for securing more satisfying employment as they seek to balance their work-life needs.

**WHAT WOMEN EXPECT** Women want opportunity, fair pay, and a healthy economy. When asked by the Lifetime poll which issues were extremely important in influencing their voting decision this year, the largest group of women – 39% – chose jobs and the economy, and 36% cited equal pay. In the *Progress and Perils* report, 90% cited pay equity as a top priority.

**WHAT WOMEN FIND** Department of Labor (DOL) and Census Bureau websites emphasize good news and underplay problems that prevent full and equal participation of women in the workforce. Without solid data on wages and information on job rights, women will not have the necessary knowledge to overcome barriers that limit their advancement and their contributions to the nation's economy.

### Abandoning Information Resources

A valuable DOL publication on the rights of women workers once distributed by the Women's Bureau, *Don't Work in the Dark – Know Your Rights*, is no longer available. Publications currently available include such upbeat titles as “Hot Jobs for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” “Women Business Owners,” and “Women in High Tech Jobs.” While providing useful information, this emphasis misses a significant point: women care about job equity. An ongoing series of “Fact Sheets” on women workers, widely used by researchers and the media, are no longer distributed. A much-used *Handbook on Women's Workers* is scheduled for re-release, but as of March 2004, no date was available for its publication. Given current Women's Bureau priorities, women's rights advocates are questioning whether the new edition will have the facts, data, and analysis needed to pursue employment equity. (See sidebars 6 and 7)

“Despite many obstacles and barriers, women are starting businesses at a greater rate than ever. But without reliable and unbiased statistics and information on business ownership, federal contracts, and anti-discrimination laws, the barriers will not fall fast enough and growth will be curtailed.”

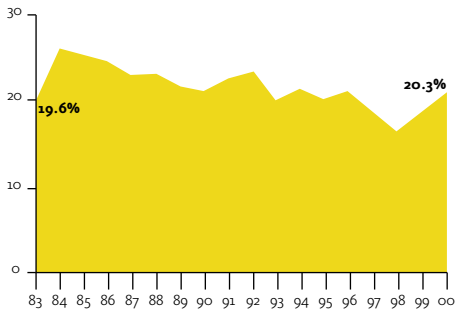
**JANE SMITH ED.D**  
**CEO, Business and Professional**  
**Women/USA (NCRW Member Center)**

“If we continue the way we are going, market forces will not solve the pay gap until 2050. That means my youngest daughter’s youngest daughter can expect equal pay.”

**KAREN NUSSBAUM**  
**Assistant to the President,**  
**AFL-CIO** <sup>28</sup>

**GRAPH 1**

**Percentage earning difference between men and women after accounting for factors that affect earnings**



Source: GAO Analysis of Panel Study of Income Dynamics data

**The Spin Factor**

A Census Bureau posting of “facts for features” for Women’s History Month in 2003 said the ratio of women’s earnings as compared to men – 76 cents for every \$1 – represents “an all-time high” and stated that women’s career earnings increase, as do men’s, with more education. A comparable posting by the Census Bureau during Women’s History Month 2000 headlined the news: “Women have almost achieved parity in educational attainment ...but not earnings equality,” stating that “Men working fulltime, year round, consistently earned more than comparable women in each of the education levels.” In fact, the disparity in wages has remained nearly constant with less than 1% change in the ratio in recent years. A definitive analysis by the General Accounting Office – *Women’s Earnings* – commissioned by Representatives Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) and John Dingell (D-MI) finds persistent barriers to equal earnings for women, who are penalized for their dual roles as wage earners and primary caretakers. (See graph 1)<sup>27</sup>

**SIDEBAR 7**

**WORKING IN THE DARK**

**True Story: The Experience of One Researcher Working in the Dark.**

It should have been an easy assignment. A newly minted researcher fresh from graduate school, I was asked by my organization to pull down information from the DOL Women’s Bureau website. The purpose? To see what kind of information is easily available to women workers on the Internet. Specifically, it was suggested that I look for a publication from a few years ago that had most likely been updated. The publication was called *Don’t Work in the Dark: Know your Rights*.

First stop, the Women’s Bureau’s website. The site has an abundance of information on topics such as *Hot Jobs for the 21st Century*, *Women Business Owners*, *Women in High Tech Jobs*, but nothing on worker’s rights for women. I knew that some information like this fell under the DOL National Resource and Information Center through the Work and Family Clearinghouse and the Fair Pay Clearinghouse. No luck there either. Entering “Don’t Work in the Dark: Know Your Rights” on the Women’s Bureau search engine brought up an error message and a toll-free number.

I called the toll-free number and reached an information center for the Bureau. The staff member helpfully offered that if I wanted any specific information, he would be able to direct me to it. I did know specifically what I was looking for: I asked him for publications on workers rights for women. He seemed not to have heard of the publication I mentioned, nor of any other publication containing information on fair pay or worker’s rights and suggested that I call the regional office.

My unsuccessful search ended at the regional office level of the Women’s Bureau. In calls to several offices, when I mentioned that I was seeking information on “fair pay”, staff noted that no publications on workers’ rights and fair pay per se were available at that time from the Bureau.

My experience looking for these materials left me with several questions – why isn’t straightforward information like this available from the government agency charged with this responsibility? Further, why doesn’t a Bureau set up to deal with working women’s issues prioritize the same issues as women workers themselves? And, bottom line, are we all going to be left working in the dark?

Gwendolyn Beetham, Research Associate, National Council for Research on Women

## SIDEBAR 8

## VANISHING RESOURCES

<b>Publications Available on the Women's Bureau Website</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2004</b>
<i>Don't Work in the Dark, Know Your Rights</i>	HERE	GONE
<i>1993 Handbook on Women Workers</i>	HERE	GONE*
<b>Fact Sheets</b>		
Domestic Violence: A Workplace Issue	HERE	GONE
Earning Differences Between Women and Men	HERE	GONE
Women Who Maintain Families	HERE	GONE
Hiring Someone to Work in Your Home	HERE	GONE
20 Facts on Women Workers	HERE	GONE
Facts About Asian American and Pacific Islander Women	HERE	GONE
Work and Elder Care: Facts for Caregivers and Their Employers	HERE	GONE
Women in Management	HERE	GONE
Child Care Workers	HERE	GONE
Outlook on Women Veterans	HERE	GONE
Black Women in the Labor Force	HERE	GONE
Women of Hispanic Origin in the Labor Force	HERE	GONE
Worth More Than We Earn: Fair Pay for Working Women	HERE	GONE
Wage and Occupational Data on Working Women	HERE	GONE
What Works: Fair Pay for Working Women	HERE	GONE
Meeting the Needs of Today's Work Force: Child Care Best Practices	HERE	GONE
Equal Pay: A Thirty-Five Year Perspective	HERE	GONE
First National Working Women's Summit	HERE	GONE
Working Women Count	HERE	GONE
Care Around the Clock: Developing Child Care Resources Before Nine and After Five	HERE	GONE
Median annual earnings for year-round full-time workers by sex in current and real dollars, 1951-1997 (Statistical Report)	HERE	GONE
Women's Jobs 1964-1996: More Than 30 Years of Progress (Statistical Report)	HERE	GONE
Women's Earnings as Percent of Men's 1979-1997 (Statistical Report)	HERE	GONE
Hot Jobs for the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century	HERE	HERE
Women Business Owners	HERE	HERE
20 Leading Occupations for Women	HERE	HERE
Nontraditional Occupations for Women	HERE	HERE
Women in High Tech Jobs (Statistical Report)	—	HERE
Trafficking in Persons	—	HERE
Occupational Outlook Handbook (Bureau of Labor Statistics)	—	HERE

\* *Handbook on Women Workers* is listed but not here; publication date not available

“The Labor Department’s removal of information that women need in order to enforce their right to equal opportunity in the workplace is especially harmful when the Department, at the same time, is curtailing its own efforts to enforce the anti-discrimination laws. The Department, for example, has ended its Equal Pay initiative and refused to use tools at its disposal to identify violations of the equal pay laws and target them for action.”

**MARCIA D. GREENBERGER**  
Co-President,  
National Women’s Law Center

“As a veteran myself, I know that women in the military need opportunities to express concerns without fear of reprisal from their chain of command.”

**REP. HEATHER WILSON**  
(R-NM)<sup>34</sup>

According to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research (an NCRW Member Center), most of the progress in closing the pay gap occurred during the 1980s. Today, there are many factors to take into consideration when analyzing apparent shifts in the gender wage gap. For instance, women in different age groups face different wage ratios (with the youngest workers experiencing less of a gap), as do women of different racial and ethnic groups (with Hispanic women making 54% of the earnings of white males).<sup>29</sup> A recent study by the Economic Policy Institute also found that the narrowing in the wage gap was partially caused by a drop in male median wage rather than a real change in women’s wages.<sup>30</sup>

### Silenced Voices For Women

Over the last year, a series of revelations has spotlighted problems women face in the armed services, including sexual harassment, rape, and unwarranted suspicion of women who bring complaints – from the Air Force Academy to the theaters of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Where is the voice for women in the military?

In February 2002, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was about to terminate a 53-year-old panel, the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS). Representative Heather Wilson (R-NM), the only congresswoman who is a veteran, said the group has been a valuable advocate for fair and equal treatment for military women and also “provides information to senior leadership that they would not get through the regular chain of command.”<sup>31</sup> Right-wing critics labeled the decades-old panel “insubordinate” when it urged the Defense Department to let women serve on submarines and on helicopter crews of Special Forces units. After Wilson met with defense officials, the committee was resuscitated, but with a new mission – to focus on issues such as healthcare for servicewomen and the effects of deployment on family life, but not issues of equity and access.<sup>32</sup>

### Information Withheld

In February 2004, a newly appointed official removed references to sexual orientation from a website designed to educate government employees about their rights. Scott J. Bloch, head of the US Office of Special Counsel, an independent agency created to protect whistleblowers and other federal employees, said he ordered the references removed because he was unsure whether federal law protected workers discriminated against because they were lesbians, gay men, or bisexuals. Elaine Kaplan, who served as Special Counsel from 1998 to 2003, told the Washington Post: “It seemed to us that this was well-established law. Part of the job of the agency is to educate employees about their rights.”<sup>33</sup>

## Violence Against Women: A Matter of Human Rights

“Violence against women is still epidemic in this country. Any unnecessary delays or withholding of information by the government that could help create solutions to this urgent need is deeply disturbing.”

**KATHY RODGERS**  
President, NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund  
(NCRW Member Center)

“With respect to CEDAW, because of the complexity of the text and practice related to CEDAW, the Administration has decided to keep the instrument under review and has not requested, pending further notice, Senate action.”

**SECRETARY OF STATE  
COLIN POWELL**  
in a February 2, 2004, letter to Senator Joseph Biden

**WHAT WOMEN EXPECT** Eighty-five percent of the women polled by Lifetime said a candidate’s position on violence against women would affect their vote – 36% called that issue “extremely important” to them. In the *Progress and Perils* report, reducing domestic violence and sexual assault was a top priority for 92% of American women.

**WHAT WOMEN FIND** Studies mandated by Congress on the problems that victims of domestic violence face with workplace and insurance discrimination languish in extensive review processes and are not released in a timely fashion. In addition, our country is one of a handful of nations that has not ratified a landmark treaty on women’s human rights, which continues to be blocked without explanation.

### Studies Withheld

Under the 2000 Violence Against Women Act, the Attorney General is required to conduct a national study of discrimination against domestic violence victims in the issuing or administration of insurance policies. This has been a major problem for domestic violence victims, and advocates fought hard to make this part of the law. The report to Congress was due in October 2001. The Women’s Law Project, awarded a grant to prepare the report in September 2001, negotiated two drafts before a final one was approved in June 2003. As of March 2004, the report has still not been published. A similarly mandated report on appropriate responses by employers to workplace needs of victims of domestic violence has also not been released, nearly two years after its due date. Data in these reports would support legislation introduced last fall to address insurance discrimination and workplace issues.

### Treaty Delayed: Human Rights in the Balance

The United States remains one of less than 10% of countries in the United Nations that have not ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the major human rights treaty for women around the world. Under both Democratic and Republic administrations, vital action on this treaty has been delayed. For years, Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) blocked action on the treaty as head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, but his successor, Senator Joseph Biden (D-DE), was ready to move forward. That seemed likely at first, with Secretary of State Colin Powell sending the CEDAW treaty to the Senate and telling the Foreign Relations Committee in 2002 that it was “generally desirable and should be ratified.” When Senator Biden scheduled hearings, however, the State Department failed to testify, noting that the treaty had been sent to Attorney General John Ashcroft and the Justice Department for additional review. Although the Committee approved the treaty on a bi-partisan vote of 12 to 7 in 2003, it was not brought up before the full Senate. Now in 2004, the Committee Chair, Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN), refused to take up CEDAW until the Justice Department completes its review.

## Conclusion: A Call for Accountability and Action

The combined effect of the decisions and actions outlined in this report are deeply troubling for American women and girls – and for their families and communities. The pattern is unfortunately all too clear: cutting vital information, stacking scientific panels, de-funding agencies, withholding data, raising doubts, spreading misinformation, holding back studies, silencing voices for women, spinning data, abandoning information resources, privileging ideology over science, inhibiting health providers, censoring researchers. The cumulative effect is a devastating loss of reliable, accessible, research-based information on the three critical issues to women’s lives that this report focuses on – health, employment, and violence.

The American public – women and men – has good reason to question whether they can trust that the information and analysis they receive from Washington is complete, accurate, and based on solid science. As this report documents, misinformation – or the lack of information – has a direct and harmful effect on the lives of women and girls.

The National Council for Research on Women joins others in the research and science community in a wakeup call to the nation. Accurate, trustworthy, science-based information and data matter, and we should be able to count on our government to provide it.

As Martha Farnsworth Riche, former Director of the Census Bureau, says in the Afterword to this report, “Although many organizations conduct research that is relevant to public policy, only the information developed by the federal government has the scope and the credibility to bring policy debates to a close.”

The Council and its 100 member centers have a special reason to hold the government accountable for accurate, timely, and non-ideological data and information on women and girls: it is the basis of quality research to identify trends and gaps, proffer solutions, and learn from the past. **Without trust in the information our government provides, research suffers as do women’s lives. And when women’s lives are affected, so too are families, communities, our economy, and our democracy.**

We dedicate ourselves to continuing the work of this report.

What can be done? We believe that advocacy and transparency are key. In case after case, it has been the advocacy of members of Congress, the research community, the media, and girls’ and women’s organizations that has held federal officials accountable for the accuracy and trustworthiness of the information they provide.

“What’s unusual about the current epidemic [of politics] is not that the Bush administration examines candidates for compatibility with its ‘values.’ It’s how deep the practice cuts; in particular, the way it now invades areas once immune to this kind of manipulation.”<sup>35</sup>

**DONALD KENNEDY**  
*Executive Editor-in-Chief, Science,  
and former President, Stanford  
University*

We join with these efforts and call for the following steps to guarantee the integrity of public information about women and girls:

- Researchers and other professionals must take an active role in identifying where information is being distorted, no longer gathered, or misused; they must challenge elected representatives to confront the issue; and they must communicate the importance of accurate, complete information to the general public.
- Researchers can also help NCRW populate the MisInformation Clearinghouse ([www.ncrw.org/misinfo.html](http://www.ncrw.org/misinfo.html)), a growing register of omissions, alterations, and distortions of vital information that was once readily available, and a repository of links to sites where good information can still be found.
- Finally, concerned citizens must voice their concerns about missing or distorted information in a public way, communicating to officials and elected representatives the crucial need for unbiased, objective information.

Working together, we can assure that the vital flow of good, solid information about women and girls continues to inform public debates and the policies that affect us, our families, our communities, and our society as a whole.

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## SIDEBAR 9

### WHY WE CARE ABOUT FEDERAL REPORTING ON GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

For nearly two decades Girls Incorporated, the national nonprofit youth organization that inspires all girls to be strong, smart and bold<sup>SM</sup>, has published a series of Fact Sheets<sup>36</sup> on the status of girls and young women ages 6 to 18 in the United States. We were responding to consistent requests from our constituents and stakeholders for reliable, accessible information on girls and young women.

We found then and continue to discover every year the importance of US government investment in designing, funding, collecting, commissioning, and making available a variety of key datasets on adults and youth, from which we can draw reliable and well-reported information about girls and young women. One of the oldest of these is Monitoring the Future, annual national survey results on young people's drug use. Commissioned by the National Institutes of Health, researchers Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman and their colleagues at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan have been reporting on adolescent substance use in consistent ways since 1975, producing invaluable trend data by gender, school grade, geographic region, race/ethnicity, and more. Begun much later by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (YRBS) provides annual updates on a wide range of youth behaviors and background variables, enabling us to trace growth and development; safety and accidents; sexuality; substance use; and diet and exercise. We know from YRBS, for example, that teen pregnancies and births are down and sexually transmitted infections are up, and we can debate the relative contributions to these trends of popular culture, educational approaches, and decisions of young people.

Without the consistent data of the National Assessment of Educational Progress and the National Center for Education Statistics we would not know that over the previous couple of decades girls essentially have closed the gender gap in math course work. Now we know how to close gaps and can move on to close the racial, ethnic, and income gaps in math course taking and access to excellent math education. Using NCES data on college enrollment and degrees, we also can celebrate the achievements of women in the biological sciences and address their persistent under representation in physics, engineering, and computer science.

Consistent, hard, reliable data can help us figure out what works and what needs to be done. The national investment in statistical data collection and reporting is a crucial foundation for sound policy making.

*Heather Johnston Nicholson, Ph.D., Director of Research Girls Incorporated® (NCRW Member Center)  
February 27, 2004*

## Afterword

By Martha Farnsworth Riche, former Director, US Census Bureau

**A**lthough many organizations conduct research that is relevant to public policy, only the information developed by the federal government has the scope and the credibility to bring policy debates to a close. Information developed and communicated with private funding can set the direction for these debates, but it takes public resources to produce the simultaneously broad and detailed findings that are required for making policy in a nation that is geographically and socio-economically diverse. Thus, it is troubling to see the pattern of suppressed information revealed in this report. From a policy perspective, it suggests that two politically motivated stances are at work to constrain impartial government information, with effects that are harmful to women.

### First, information reduction

Federal funding for statistics and research is always a hard sell to congressional appropriators, so each new administration looks for activities it can eliminate so it can meet its priorities within budgetary realities. In this context, the current administration seems to have targeted information that attends to the needs of particular population groups for elimination, in this case, women.

This choice is consistent with longstanding resistance among conservatives to “special treatment” for particular population groups, including women and members of racial and ethnic groups. This resistance is reflected in rejection of affirmative action, based on the premise that Americans now have similar opportunities and resources for taking advantage of them. But women aren’t the same as men, and women of color are in a double bind.

Historically, information activities have ignored women in favor of categories like “man,” “family,” or “household.” Not so long ago, major federal health studies only addressed men – how men could maintain their health, how men responded to pharmaceuticals, how medical interventions could cure men. If you don’t see that as a problem, you don’t see why women should have “special treatment.”

Yet without specific attention to gender differences in information collection and publication – gender disaggregation of data – the effects of gender differences are hidden in a black box. With such information, researchers can find which policies are working, and which need attention. The recent, definitive General Accounting Office (GAO) investigation into the persistent earnings differences between men and women is a good example.<sup>37</sup>

The GAO’s careful analysis finds that the major cause of these differences is that women are different from men. Specifically, because women bear and raise children, they have different work patterns (part time, partial years, years out of the workforce, etc.) that yield lower earnings. Thus,

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gender-disaggregated analysis focuses attention on workforce practices that unnecessarily force women into a no-win choice between work and family. Since these individual choices accumulate into a no-win societal choice between constraining economic growth or avoiding or slighting children, they call for important policy debates.

### **Second, unbalanced information**

Perhaps the most troubling interface between politics and science is the desire of interested parties to keep open those debates that research has closed. The pattern revealed in this and other reports bespeaks a rejection of fact-based decision-making disguised by cloaking positions rooted in religious belief, tradition, or self-interest in the trappings of scientific language or credentials.

The result, as displayed here, is the substitution of scientifically disproved assertions for robust research results in federal information sources. Such biased information can have consequences for individual women, as well as for groups of women, that could be addressed by public policy. At worst, these consequences can be life threatening, as in the many examples of unbalanced information regarding aspects of reproductive health identified in this report.

### **Bottom line**

As long as federal data collection and research continue to distinguish males from females, the results will be useful to experienced analysts. Even though, for example, the present administration has transformed the every-5-year surveys of women- and minority-owned businesses into a survey of all business owners, the dataset will still distinguish women business owners from men. However, confidentiality and privacy restrictions justifiably constrain access to public data, limiting the range of private analyses. Meanwhile, organizations that lack a research capability have to engage an intermediary to mine the data for information the federal government may not choose to analyze or report. Given the pattern described in this report, women's advocates will have to devote more of their scarce research funds to policing the provision of federal information.

Writing about freedom and the foundations of justice, Nobel economics laureate Amartya Sen concluded that the “informational base... is of decisive significance” in choosing between competing principles “and can be the crucial point of focus in many debates on practical policies.”<sup>38</sup>

In short, the information that is excluded in making societal choices is as important as the information that is included. When information is excluded, whether deliberately or through indifference, policy choices are skewed at the expense of freedom and justice for all.

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# NCRW Member Centers

## Arizona

University of Arizona  
Southwest Institute for Research on Women

## California

Mills College  
Women's Leadership Institute  
Stanford University  
Institute for Research on Women & Gender

University of California, Berkeley  
Beatrice M. Bain Research Group

University of California, Davis  
Consortium for Women and Research

University of California, Los Angeles  
Center for the Study of Women  
Higher Education Research Institute

University of Southern California  
Center for Feminist Research

## Colorado

University of Denver  
Higher Education Resource Services, Mid-America

## District of Columbia

American Association of University Women  
Educational Foundation

American Council on Education  
Office of Women in Higher Education

American University,  
Women & Politics Institute

Association of American Colleges and Universities  
Program on the Status and Education of Women

Business and Professional Women's Foundation

Center for Policy Alternatives

Center for Women Policy Studies

General Federation of Women's Clubs Women's  
History and Resource Center International

George Washington University  
Women's Studies Program

Howard University  
African American Women's Institute

Institute for Women's Policy Research

International Center for Research on Women

National Center for Policy Research for Women and  
Families

National Council of Negro Women

National Women's Law Center

Society for Women's Health Research

Women's Research and Education Institute

Young Women's Christian Association of the USA

## Florida

University of Florida  
Center for Women's Studies and Gender Research

## Georgia

Georgia Institute of Technology  
Center for the Study of Women, Science and  
Technology

Spelman College  
Women's Research & Resource Center

## Illinois

University of Illinois at Chicago  
Center for Research on Women & Gender

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,  
Women and Gender in Global Perspectives Program

Loyola University  
Gannon Center for Women & Leadership

## Indiana

Girls Incorporated National Resource Center

## Louisiana

Tulane University  
Newcomb Center for Research on Women

## Maine

University of New England  
Women's Center for Ethics in Action

## Maryland

National Women's Studies Association

Towson State University  
Institute for Teaching & Research on Women

University of Maryland, College Park  
Consortium on Race, Gender, and Ethnicity

## Massachusetts

Brandeis University  
National Center on Women & Aging  
Women's Studies Research Center

Harvard University  
The JFK School of Government, Women  
and Public Policy Program  
Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study

Higher Education Resource Services, New England

Mt. Holyoke College  
Five College Women's Studies Research Center

Simmons School of Management  
Center for Gender in Organizations

Smith College  
Project on Women and Social Change

University of Massachusetts Boston  
Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy

Wellesley College  
Wellesley Centers for Women

## Michigan

University of Michigan  
Center for the Education of Women  
Institute for Research on Women and Gender

## Minnesota

University of Minnesota  
Center for Advanced Feminist Studies  
Center on Women and Public Policy, Humphrey  
Institute

College of St. Catherine  
Abigail Quigley McCarthy Center for Women

## New Jersey

Rutgers University  
Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton  
Institute of Politics  
Center for Women and Work  
Center for Women's Global Leadership  
Institute for Research on Women  
Institute for Women's Leadership

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**New York**

Association of Junior Leagues International  
Barnard College  
The Barnard Center for Research on Women  
Catalyst  
City University of New York  
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Ms. Foundation for Women  
New York University  
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