COLLECTION OVERVIEW

WOMEN’S STUDIES

I. SCOPE

Women’s Studies is an interdisciplinary field that examines historical and contemporary women's experiences and roles. The Library of Congress collects materials in all formats, languages, and time periods that explore cultural constructions of gender through class, age, and race. Resources cover a broad range of subjects including works related to or about women, works specifically on how women’s lives differ from men’s and men’s from women’s, and feminist critiques of topics unrelated to women. This overview includes all materials in the Library of Congress that can be used to research any aspect of women’s individual or collective experience.

II. SIZE

Due to the highly interdisciplinary of Women’s Studies, the Library cannot determine the precise number of items that relate to women. Materials for women's studies research can be found in every class, in every format, in all languages, and for all time periods. Almost any item could be studied by virtue of its inclusion or exclusion of women. Careful searches in the online catalog by classification, subject, and year have produced the numbers given in this overview. Class HQ, covering the topics of Family, Gender, and Sexuality, contains almost 100,000 titles, but many of these works focus on men. Within the HQ class, about 29,000 records are on feminism (HQ1100-HQ2044); 16,000 on sexual life (HQ12-HQ472), and more than 50,000 on family, marriage, and home (HQ503-HQ1058).

More than 150,000 book and serial records appear in the Library's computerized catalogs under the terms "women" or “woman.” Compared to the numbers in the 1993 Women’s Studies Collection Overview, the Library has doubled its print holdings in this area in the last fifteen years. Yet, this new figure does not include most of the 6,700 records on girls, the more than 600 books and serials on lesbians, 760 on goddesses, or most novels or biographical works (many thousands) by or about women. There are close to 3,000 books specifically on African American women, but hundreds more on African Americans' experiences in America and African American literature and music; many of these works would include information on women.

For other peoples of the U.S. and the world, whether defined geographically, historically, racially, nationally, ethnically, or otherwise, the Library's collections are extensive. For example, the Library holds almost 1,000 titles on women and Islam, and more than 800 on the Virgin Mary. There are more than 18,000 books on nurses or nursing, and 650 on women and
photography. The online catalog shows more than 500 books on women and sports, not counting books on individual sports (almost 100 on women and basketball; 91 on women and soccer) or about individual athletes.

III. GENERAL RESEARCH STRENGTHS

The 1995 Research Libraries Group conspectus for women's studies rated the Library's collections at a research or comprehensive level in almost every area, and these collecting levels have remained equally high in subsequent years.

In the print collections, researchers at the Library have access to more than thirty million books and bound serials. In addition to the large numbers of books specifically on women described above, the Library provides additional sources for any topic sought. For example, a patron studying a nineteenth-century woman scientist in North Carolina can find materials on the science, education, and religion of the period. The patron can also find family and local histories, census data, information on clubs and businesses in her area, and details on daily life such as clothing, food, and housing. Additional materials will be found in the manuscript, prints and photographs, and map collections.

Long runs of journals are another general research strength of the Library. Those in women’s studies can be supplemented by similar runs on every other topic and other languages. Popular magazines sit on the shelves with the most scholarly journals. Clothing styles, food habits, health guidelines, marriage rites, access to education, business endeavors—all these topics (and every other) can be examined for every country at every time period. And again, the print materials will be supplemented by the unique items in the special collections.

No other library collection has the depth and breadth of the Library of Congress.

IV. ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

In the last decade, the Library has subscribed to many databases that greatly increase the research potential for women’s studies topics. Some databases focus specifically on women (for example, Contemporary Women’s Issues, Gerritsen's Women's History, North American Women’s Letters and Diaries, Women and Social Movements in the U.S., Women's Studies International, and Gender Watch), but other general databases such as the full-text online book, newspaper (regional, national, and international), dissertation, and journal collections make searches possible for women’s topics that could not have been done twenty years ago and greatly supplement the collections in other formats. The addition of international databases has extended the research capabilities at the Library.

American Memory contains superb resources for studying the suffrage movement, but also substantial material for other aspects of women’s lives, including political activism, immigration, labor, and daily life. The American Memory site American Women provides an excellent
gateway to the Library’s multi-format collections on American women’s history and culture.

The Library’s Web sites for Exhibitions, Global Gateway, Veterans History (with more than 300 digitized women’s stories), Minerva, and Thomas also contain research information on women. Webcasts of events at the Library and the National Book Festival complement collections in other formats. New sources are added frequently.

V. AREAS OF DISTINCTION

The quantity of materials available in all formats for research in women’s studies, and especially women’s history, makes it very difficult to select areas of distinction. The Library has extensive serial publications, including long runs of nineteenth-century American and European women's journals and newspapers, old college catalogs, and publications of women's organizations such as the League of Women Voters and the Female Anti-Slavery societies.

Through the international holdings of the Law Library, women's legal status can be traced over time in all the countries of the world. Publications of the U.S. and of foreign governments and of international organizations, such as the United Nations, can be used to trace social and political reform and economic and demographic changes affecting women. The Library also has more than 17,000 doctoral dissertations about women or girls.

Microform collections such as Columbia University's Women Pioneers and Professionals, the Suffragists Oral History Collection, and the Twentieth Century Trade Union Woman Collection give first-hand accounts of women's lives. The Hispanic Division has recorded more than 100 Latin American women writers for the Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape, and the Library’s New Delhi office taped readings by more than two dozen South Asian women writers.

The Library's resources for the study of women's roles in the social and political reform movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are unparalleled. Examples of items of special note include Susan B. Anthony's diaries and scrapbooks, Carrie Chapman Catt's library, photographs and film of the 1913 suffrage parade, papers of women Supreme Court justices and Members of Congress, many photographs of suffrage gatherings, anti-suffrage cartoons, tapes and field notes from Margaret Mead's expeditions, and the "Cornell University Collection of Women's Rights Pamphlets."

With the photo archives of *Look* and *U.S. News & World Report* (both in the Prints and Photographs Division), researchers can trace American women's activities from the 1940s to the 1980s. *Wonder Woman* and *Heart Throb* comic books plus the 300 pulp fiction magazines provide other examples of how women were viewed in this time period.

Hundreds of other special collections augment the Library's ability to serve its patrons. These include photographs, maps, radio talk show tapes, scores and song lyrics, and many American feature films and television broadcasts.
For a detailed examination of the Library’s holdings in all formats in American women’s history, see the “Research Guide” portion of *American Women: A Gateway to Library of Congress Resources for the Study of Women's History and Culture in the United States* via the Library’s American memory home page.

VI. WEAKNESSES/EXCLUSIONS

The publications of women's organizations have often been brief, issued irregularly, printed on poor quality paper, or have had limited distribution. The Library of Congress has not collected many of these types of publications, and especially lacks newsletters of women's organizations. Regional publications of women's groups are not generally added to the Library's collections, but since many women's activities have been conducted on the local level, much of research value has been missed. Preserving these items, which include works such as histories of local women’s organizations and their cookbooks, has been left to local libraries.

In the last few decades there has been a great increase in the number of foreign women's organizations and in the number of books, serials, and Web sites issued by and about women in other countries. This rapid growth during a time of decreasing budgets has made it difficult for the Library to acquire these new materials at the same level as in the past.

Increasingly, manuscript collections and runs of older serials are being made available on microform or in subscription databases; the Library has not acquired these microform collections and databases comprehensively, although it does have substantial collections.