

**Women and Gender Studies Internet Reference Resources: A Critical Overview**

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**Summary:** The field of women and gender studies has matured over the last decade with many colleges and universities now offering undergraduate majors, and several others offering master's and doctoral degrees. Coinciding with the growth of the discipline and the growth of published materials, there has been a concurrent evolution of electronic resources in women and gender studies, both proprietary and freely available on the Web. This article provides a general overview with annotations of selected online resources in women and gender studies.

**Keywords:** women's studies; gender studies; online resources; Internet; World Wide Web

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### **INTRODUCTION**

As a discipline within institutions of higher education in the United States, Women's Studies has become more firmly established in the last ten to fifteen years. The website *Women's Studies Programs, Departments, & Research Centers* (see description below) maintained by Joan Korenman has links to over 700 sites for programs, departments, and centers from around the world. Over 600 of these sites are within the United States. The field of women's studies has grown from its evolution in the women's movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s when only a handful of classes were taught on college campuses to today where many universities now offer undergraduate majors in women's studies and more and more are beginning to create graduate programs. Consequently, the amount of scholarship and publishing on women and gender studies has grown substantially. Along with this has been the tremendous growth of internet related resources for women and gender studies. Currently, the web offers a vast amount of information for women and gender studies; indeed we are now at a point where there are so many resources available on the internet that finding the quality resources can be daunting.

### **CRITERIA**

This paper provides an overview of some of the best websites for women and gender studies, concentrating on those sites which have an academic or scholarly focus. To determine which women and gender studies sites to include the author relied on several important criteria. First and foremost, I focused on sites created by academic librarians or scholars in the field of women's studies. Women's studies scholars and librarians are the ones who know the discipline the best, the ones who work with the literature every day, the ones who teach classes. Many sites have been created by the very people who saw a need which was not being addressed by other online

resources. Second, I concentrated on sites which have for the most part been around for several years. Many of the websites featured here began in the early to mid 1990s and are still considered the best. Third, I made an effort to include websites which empower and educate women and girls. The Internet can be a powerful tool for transformational change, and many of the resources cited in this article have as one of their goals to educate and empower women.

Finally, I concentrated on sites that covered a wide range of subjects, because I could not include all of the excellent women's studies websites in this brief article. I also concentrated on sites whose focus was broadly conceived, because these tend to lead users to other significant sites. For a current listing of women's studies websites in individual disciplines, readers are referred to the general/meta sites listed below, especially the *Women's Studies Librarian's Office, University of Wisconsin System* website, and the *WSSLinks: Women and Gender* website. The recently published annotated bibliography *Women's Studies: A Recommended Bibliography* edited by Linda A. Krikos and Cindy Ingold (Libraries Unlimited, 2004, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) provides annotations to websites in 19 subjects as well as annotating the core print English language literature.

### **PROPRIETARY RESOURCES**

In the 1990s, women's studies faculty and librarians had very few online databases to choose from. The databases that were available often provided very little full text, indexed only selected titles, and often did not index periodicals from cover to cover. With the growth of the discipline and the advocacy of women's studies librarians, there now are a large number of online indexing and abstracting sources, full text databases, and digitized collections for women's studies. For a comparison of the features of many of these resources, readers should check out the web page maintained by the Collection Development Committee of the Women's Studies Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries within the American Library Association <<http://www.libr.org/wss/projects/electronic.html>>. The Instruction Committee of the WSS also

has created database instruction guides for several proprietary online databases. They are available at <<http://www.libr.org/wss/projects/guides.html>>.

### *Indexing and Abstracting Sources*

#### **Women's Studies International** (1972 to date)

This product, available from National Information Services Corporation (NISC), is the single best online indexing source for women's studies literature. The content of the database derives from six separate files: *Women Studies Abstracts*, has contributed over 72,000 records; the *Women's Studies Database* created at the University of Toronto Library; four files from the Women's Studies Librarian's Office, University of Wisconsin System; a MEDLINE subset on women; *Women of color and Southern Women: A Bibliography of Social Science Research* produced at the University of Memphis between 1975-1995; and *Women's Health and Development: An Annotated Bibliography* of holdings from the World Health Organization. NISC adds additional titles including internet documents, articles from professional journals, conference papers, books, book chapters, selected popular literature, government reports, working papers, and Websites. Because of its depth and breadth of coverage for literature on in women and gender studies, Women's Studies International is one online database to which all libraries should subscribe. Unfortunately, the software provided by NISC is not the most intuitive.

### *Full Text Databases*

#### **Contemporary Women's Issues** (1992 to date)

Contemporary Women's Issues or CWI is available from the following vendors: OCLC FirstSearch, the Gale Group, and Lexis Nexis. This resource includes the full text of several women's studies periodicals although the dates of coverage for the full text can vary. The real

strength of the database is the inclusion of newsletters, research reports from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other associations, as well as other types of reports and materials which many libraries would not subscribe to or collect. The earliest records in CWI date back to the early 1990s. The database is multidisciplinary, covering topics such as health and reproductive issues, domestic violence, legal and educational issues, employment, gender equality, politics and human rights, and women's studies as a discipline. It does not cover women in the arts and humanities except for including book reviews. This is an excellent resource that provides access to much of the gray literature.

### **GenderWatch**

GenderWatch, available from ProQuest Information and Learning, is another full text database which covers 175 women's studies publications including newsletters, periodicals, books, proceedings, conference reports, and governmental and NGO reports. A very select number of titles go back to the 1970s, but the majority of titles coverage is from the 1980s and 1990s. The database is also multidisciplinary, covering many of the same topics as CWI; however, GenderWatch does cover the arts and humanities better than CWI.

### *Digitized Collections*

#### **The Gerritsen Collection--Women's History Online, 1543-1945.**

The Gerritsen Collection from ProQuest Information and Learning is the digitized collection of the microfilm collection of materials collect by C. V. and Aletta Jacobs Gerritsen in the late 1800s. The collection spans more than four centuries and fifteen languages, and has over 4,700 publications. The online version includes two million pages of images as they appeared in the original printed works. Two segments comprise the collection: periodicals make up 25 percent of the collection, and monographs make up 75 percent.

Alexander Street Press offers several impressive digitized collections, most notably North American Women's Letters and Diaries.

### **FREELY AVAILABLE WEBSITES**

The websites listed below generally meet all of the criteria discussed in the beginning of this article. Many other valuable women and gender studies websites exist but space considerations limited listing to only a small number. The websites listed below are excellent sites to know and use for reference purposes. Additionally, most of these sites will lead users to other useful Internet resources.

#### General/Meta Sites

**FeMiNa.** <<http://www.femina.com/>>

FeMiNa created by Cybergrl, Inc provides a searchable directory of "female friendly sites and information on the World Wide Web." The front page provides a Yahoo- like directory including the following topics: Arts and Humanities, Business and Finance, Computers and Science, Education, Entertainment, Family and Motherhood, Girls, Health and Wellness, Media and Publications, Regional, Recreation and Leisure, and Society and Culture. FeMiNa also features a site of the month, and a link to the latest women's news which tends to be health- related or consumer information. There are several opportunities to provide feedback and to get involved including online surveys and quick polls. Because of its Yahoo-like structure, this site would appeal to the general public.

#### **Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in Media.**

<<http://www.uiowa.edu/~commstud/resources/GenderMedia/femmedia.html>>

This site was created by Karla Tonella, a librarian at the University of Iowa. The site is organized by the following categories: advertising, African American, Asian American, assorted

gender and media links, cyberspace, feminist media, indexes and directories, Latin American, LesBiGay, Native American and other indigenous peoples, print media, television and film, and other media and mixed media. Under each category, users are directed to either full text articles and reports, or other websites.

**Women's Studies Database, University of Maryland.**

<<http://www.mith2.umd.edu/WomensStudies>>

This is the premiere database for the discipline of women's studies. Begun in 1992, the site serves "those people interested in the women's studies profession and in general women's issues." It provides a wealth of information for women and gender studies faculty and graduate students including conference listings, calls for papers, employment listings, and syllabi from women's studies courses. It also provides reviews of current films, often from a feminist perspective, which have been culled from radio broadcasts and other resources. A reading room provides access to papers on a variety of topics; a section titled "Program Support" provides access to sites about pedagogy, curriculum policies, theory information, and establishing a major; and a link called "Gender Issues" provides access to other websites. This website provides valuable information for faculty, scholars, and students in the field.

**Women's Studies Librarian's Office, University of Wisconsin System.**

<<http://www.library.wisc.edu/libraries/WomensStudies/>>

The Women's Studies Librarian's Office at Wisconsin was established in 1977, and has been a guiding source for many women's studies librarians and faculty. The site gives information about the publications of the office, *Feminist Collections: A Quarterly of Women's Studies Resources*, *Feminist Periodicals*, and *New Books on Women and Feminism*, including a full text link to several articles from *Feminist Collections*. Links by subject provide access to a wealth of other websites. Librarians can find a link to feminist and women's publishers and to a database of

core books in women's studies. The core books database, created by the Women's Studies Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries within the American Library Association, provides citations to books in print for over forty subjects. Users can also find links to homepages of feminist magazines and journals, and access to *WAVE: Women's Videos Database*, as well as a list of video distributors. For librarians at college and research libraries with responsibilities in women and gender studies, this site is an essential resource.

**WSSLinks: Women and Gender Studies Web Sites.** <<http://libr.org/wss/WSSLinks/index.html>>

WSSLinks is maintained by the Women's Studies Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries. The authors, all academic librarians, state that the purpose "is to provide access to a wide range of resources in support of Women's Studies." The page is subdivided into the following subjects: general sites, archives, art, business, culture (mostly literature), education, film, health, history, international, lesbian sites, music, philosophy, politics, science and technology, and theology. Each of these pages offers a consistent design making it very easy for users to navigate within the pages. Individual subject pages are organized depending on the best approach for that subject, so for example, the page on Women and Business includes Associations/Organizations/Centers, Biographies of Prominent Business Women, Directories of Women Owned Businesses, Electronic Discussion Forums, Newsletters and Journals, Resources for Business Start Ups, and Statistical Sources while the page on Theology includes General Sites, followed by links arranged by specific religions. Librarians with expertise in these subject areas maintain these pages assuring high quality and currency. The only weakness of WSSLinks is that its coverage of subjects is limited.

Feminist Theory and Women's Studies as a Discipline

**Feminist Theory Website.** <<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/feminism/enin.html>>

The Feminist Theory Website, available in English, French, and Spanish lists two major goals: to encourage a wide range of research into feminist theory, and to encourage dialog between women (and men) from different countries around the world. The website provides information about various fields within feminist theory including everything from body studies to sexuality; from critical theory to postmodernism; from liberal feminism to radical feminism. Each link within the thirty-one different categories of feminism provides a bibliography of articles and books on that topic, a list of critical thinkers within that field, and a link to websites if they exist. The home page also provides links to different national/ethnic feminisms which are organized by country or region, and to information on individual feminists. The latter section is arranged alphabetically and provides brief biographical information on each feminist thinker, a summary of the person's major themes, and a bibliography of sources, if available, by the person. The website contains over 5,400 bibliographical entries. Created by Dr. Kristin Switala and hosted by the Center for Digital Discourse and Culture at Virginia Tech University, the Feminist Theory Website premiered on the internet in November 1997, and provides an excellent introduction and overview to feminist theory.

**NWSA: National Women's Studies Association.** <<http://www.nwsa.org>>

NWSA, founded in 1977, is "committed to support and promote feminist teaching, research, and professional and community service at the pre-K through post-secondary levels." The organization is the main professional association for women's studies faculty, scholars, and professionals. The organization website provides links for women's studies program directors to network, information for students, lists of conferences and calls for papers, a job bank, and current news.

**Women's Studies Programs, Departments, & Research Centers.**

<<http://research.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/programs.html>>

Joan Korenman of the University of Maryland created this resource of more than 700 women's studies programs, departments, and research centers around the world that have websites. Korenman arranges the programs alphabetically, listing programs in the United States first followed by those outside the United States. The programs and departments offering graduate degrees or concentrations are noted in a brief annotation. Korenman also offers a link to institutions offering online degrees. Other useful sites cataloging women's studies programs are Gerri Gibbi's page <<http://creativefolk.com/directories.html>> and the Artemis Guide to Women's Studies in the U.S. <<http://www.artemisguide.com/>> which lists 371 programs in the United States arranged alphabetically by state. Smith College also provides a page to graduate programs in the United States <<http://www.smith.edu/wst/gradlinks.html>> although it has not been updated in over one year.

#### Activist, Political, Law

**American Association of University Women.** <<http://www.aauw.org/>>

The American Association of University Women or AAUW, founded in 1881, is one of the oldest advocacy organizations for women in the United States. AAUW is composed of three corporations. The Association advocates education and equity for women and girls; the Educational Foundation provides scholarships for graduate women around the globe; and the Legal Advocacy Fund works to fight sex discrimination in higher education. The website provides current information on AAUW's research and activities including listing conferences.

**Feminist Majority.** <<http://www.feminist.org>>

The mission of the Feminist Majority Foundation is to “develop bold, new strategies and programs to advance women's equality, non-violence, economic development, and most importantly, empowerment of women and girls in all sectors of society.” The Feminist Majority

Foundation Online offers the best single source for feminist activism on the internet. Buttons from the front page provide a wide array of links to information, current news, and opportunities to get involved and take action. Examples of the categories one can link to include a “Feminist Internet Gateway” which provides a well organized resource to other websites; a link for “Student Activism”; information on health issues including breast cancer; and a link to feminist careers. The “Feminist Internet Gateway” provides a current list of links to women and gender organizations in many fields.

**NOW: The National Organization for Women.** <<http://www.now.org>>

The National Organization for Women (NOW) claims it is the largest organization for feminist activists in the United States with 500,000 members from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Founded in 1966, NOW strives to bring about equality for all women by working to “eliminate discrimination and harassment in the workplace, schools, the justice system, and all other sectors of society; secure abortion, birth control and reproductive rights for all women; end all forms of violence against women; eradicate racism, sexism and homophobia; and promote equality and justice in our society.” The NOW site allows users to get involved and take action, and to check out current issues ranging from abortion rights to economic equity from Title IX to women in the military. Each of the current issues links provides background information on the topic, current advocacy being done, and NOW’s stand on the issue. Users can also find out about local chapters.

**Women’s Human Rights Resources.**

< <http://www.law-lib.utoronto.ca/diana/mainpage.htm> >

The purpose of Women’s Human Rights Resources, maintained by the Bora Laskin Law Library, University of Toronto, “is to help researchers, students, teachers, and human rights advocates locate authoritative and diverse information on women's international human rights via

the Internet.” The site is organized under three broad categories which reflect the goals of the website’s creators: “Share Knowledge,” “Support Advocacy,” and “Promote Scholarship.” The first category includes a Women’s Human Rights Resources Database, which lists hundreds of articles, documents, and links related to international women’s rights and legal issues. The second category lists human rights advocacy guides which bring together key documents from the international and regional human rights systems and UN bodies. The third section includes detailed research guides providing overviews on various topics, and a link to graduate fellowships in reproductive health law and women’s rights.

#### Science, Technology, and Medicine

**Center for Information Technology.** <<http://www.umbc.edu/cwit/index.html>>

The Center for Information Technology was established in 1998 by Joan Korenman with the following goals: “to encourage more women and girls to prepare for careers and become leaders in information technology; to communicate information related to the richness and breadth of women's lives, concerns, and possibilities using technology; to foster research concerning gender and information technology.” The home page offers a current listing of books, curricular resources, girl-related resources, a speakers’ bureau, and a link to related websites. Of special note is the link for websites relating to women’s issues in science and technology. As with all of Korenman’s sites, information is current and relevant.

**Center for Reproductive Rights.** <<http://www.crlp.org/>>

Formerly known as the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, the Center for Reproductive Rights is “a non-profit legal advocacy organization dedicated to promoting and defending women’s reproductive rights worldwide.” This site offers information on the following topics: legal advocacy, human rights, equality, adolescents, safe pregnancy, contraception, and

abortion. By clicking on each subject, users can access the latest information on the topic, with cross-references to additional publications, cases, legislative policy, statutes, and press releases. The site is available in Spanish and French, and includes an index.

**International Women’s Health Coalition.** < <http://www.iwhc.org/>>

The International Women’s Health Coalition (IWHC) works on health policies and programs that promote the rights and health of women and girls. Founded in 1984, IWHC works “to build political will and influence the policies of governments, donors, and international agencies to secure girls' and women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.” First, IWHC provides professional assistance and financial support to local organizations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Second, IWHC keeps abreast of current information to inform debates in the United States and abroad. Lastly, the organization advocates at intergovernmental conferences, and other international agencies. The website provides current information on policy issues, links to events such as conferences, and information on the four issues the organization focuses on: youth health; HIV/AIDS; safe abortion; and the right of women to control their own sexuality.

Another useful site is Women’s Health from the World Health Organization

<[http://www.who.int/topics/womens\\_health/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/womens_health/en/)> which provides fact sheets on women’s health issues and links to other sites.

### Global Issues

**International Center for Research on Women.** <<http://www.icrw.org/>>

The International Center for Research on Women was founded in 1976 to fill the “gaps in understanding the complex realities of women’s lives and their role in development.” ICRW works in partnership with other organizations on research and advocacy issues affecting women with special concern in the following areas: adolescence, HIV/AIDS, nutrition and food security,

poverty reduction, reproductive health, violence against women, and women's rights. Under each of these project areas, users will find research reports and a list of current activities being done in the specific area.

**International Women's Rights Action Watch.** <<http://iwrw.igc.org/about.htm>>

The International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRW) was created in 1985 at the World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya "to promote recognition of women's human rights under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the CEDAW Convention), a basic international human rights treaty." IWRW functions as the primary international Non-Governmental Organization to facilitate human rights for women and families. The website provides links to publications, information on the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, the status of CEDAW and current actions, and links to other websites. Because of the importance of CEDAW for advancing women's rights worldwide, this is an important source of current information on women's rights issues worldwide.

**Women Watch.** <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch>>

Women Watch is the central gateway to information and resources on women's equity through the United Nations system. A directory of UN resources includes categories on gender mainstreaming, international instruments and treaties, thematic issues, information on women by various world regions, and information on gender training. An especially useful feature of Women Watch is the section "Statistics and Indicators" which includes reports and databases on statistics relating to women and children. Notable reports include the *World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics* highlighting data in a wide number of fields including families, health, education and work; *State of the World's Children*; *Human Development Reports*; and a host of other reports from UN agencies and other intergovernmental agencies.

Under the category United Nations entities, users will be directed to other UN agencies and organizations working on women's issues. Notable among these other agencies is UNIFEM

<<http://www.unifem.org/>>, the women's fund at the United Nations, which provides financial and technical assistance to programs "that promote women's human rights, political participation and economic security." The Division for the Advancement of Women

<<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/index.html>> established in 1946 "advocates the improvement of the status of women of the world and the achievement of their equality with men."

Finally, INSTRAW, the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, <<http://www.un-instraw.org/en/index.html>> carries out research and training activities dedicated to the advancement of women.

### Women of Color

**Black American Feminism.** <<http://www.library.ucsb.edu/subjects/blackfeminism/>>

Black American Feminism, compiled by Sherri L. Barnes, Associate Librarian at the University of California, Santa Barbara, is a bibliography citing sources in subject areas within the humanities, social sciences, and health, medicine and science. The time period is the nineteenth century to the present, "with the majority of references representing the very influential contemporary black feminist thought that emerged in the 1970s and continues today." The bibliography is arranged into four broad disciplines: Arts and Humanities; Social Sciences; Education; Health, Medicine and Science, and includes six sections by format: (Auto) Biographies, Memoirs, and Personal Narratives; Interviews; Speeches; Multidisciplinary Anthologies; Periodicals: Special Issues; and Websites. Each of the four disciplines is further subdivided into more specific categories. Each category is prefaced with a quotation by a famous African American woman and then sources are listed alphabetically by author's last name. Barnes includes citations from professional, scholarly, popular, mainstream and alternative magazines, journals, newspapers, and books.

**Women of Color Web.** <<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/ghf/WoC/index.html>>

The mission of the Women of Color website is to provide “access to writings by and about women of color in the U.S.” Created by the Global Reproductive Health Forum at the Harvard School of Public Health, the authors provide access to writings on feminisms, sexualities, and reproductive health and rights related to women of color. Each of the three sections takes users to full text articles or papers by leading feminist writers including bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, and Barbara Smith. The site also provides teaching tools including syllabi, a list of organizations, and a link to discussion lists.

#### Statistical

##### **Gender Stats: Databases of Gender Statistics.**

<<http://devdata.worldbank.org/genderstats/home.asp>>

Gender Stats is an electronic database of gender statistics made available through the World Bank. The data are presented in various modules including summary information by country; thematic data; gender monitoring data; or data by region of the world. The thematic data include poverty indicators, education, health, basic population, and labor force indicators. The database is continuously updated; data sources include national statistics, UN sources, and World Bank surveys.

**WIDNET.** <<http://www.focusintl.com/widnet.htm>>

WIDNET, the women in development network, includes statistics organized by the following world regions: Africa, Asia, Oceania, the Americas, and Europe. Each region includes statistics on population, family, households; health; education and training; labour; and power, which are statistics on the numbers of women in government. Statistics are from the United Nations publication, *The World's Women 1995-- Trends and Statistics*.

## CONCLUSION

Clearly, the field of women and gender studies has become more main stream in the last ten years. As disciplines grow, the literature of the discipline also evolves. In the case of women's studies, there has been a steady growth of online databases including indexing and abstracting services, full text databases, and digitized collections. Additionally, World Wide Web sites have been created, many of which serve as important reference resources for librarians, scholars, and students. This article provided an overview of some of the best web resources for women and gender studies.