

# Introduction

Women are not who they used to be, and businesses and policymakers are struggling to keep up. Over the past few decades, women have moved out of the home and into the labor force. Most are now breadwinners. Many live by themselves. Divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing have become commonplace. Women have become largely independent of husbands and children as they go about their lives. The changes in the roles of women have been nothing short of revolutionary, affecting every institution in our society—from the family to the workplace, from politics to the consumer marketplace. Understanding the American woman, her wants and needs, has become more important than ever as the nation copes with economic uncertainty.

The fourth edition of *American Women: Who They Are and How They Live* examines the many dimensions of women's lives as the first decade of the 21st century comes to a close. These pages contain all-important demographic data showing the size of the female population, its changing age distribution, rising educational attainment, and evolving racial composition. New to this addition of *American Women* is an Attitudes chapter, based on data from the renowned General Social Survey, with tables comparing the attitudes of women and men on a number of important issues and examining how women's attitudes differ by age. Also included in this book is a chapter profiling women's time use based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics' invaluable American Time Use Survey. This edition of *American Women* also provides the latest labor force projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the most up-to-date statistics on women's incomes and living arrangements, and the most recent population projections from the Census Bureau.

## Value added

While the government collected most of the data presented in *American Women*, the tables published here are not reprints from government reports—as is the case in many reference books and reports. Instead, New Strategist's editors spent hundreds of hours scouring web sites, compiling numbers into meaningful statistics, and creating tables with calculations that reveal the trends.

Government web sites are useful for obtaining summary data and for tapping into complex databases. But too often summary data are not enough, and those complex databases usually require analysis by statistical program. With this volume, New Strategist has done the work for you, delving into the data and providing analysis and comparisons, placing the important information about American women at your fingertips. The texts and charts accompanying most of the tables tell the story about women, placing trends into context and revealing what the future holds. Thumbing through these pages will give you more insight into women's lives than an afternoon spent surfing databases on the Internet. With *American Women* at hand, you can get the answers to your questions even faster than you can online.

## How to use this book

*American Women* is designed for easy use. It is divided into ten chapters, organized alphabetically: Attitudes, Education, Health, Income, Labor Force, Living Arrangements, Population, Spending, Time Use, and Wealth.

Most of the tables in the book are based on data collected and published by the federal government, in particular the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the National Center for Education Statistics, the National Center for Health Statistics, and the Federal Reserve Board. The federal government continues to be the best source of up-to-date, reliable information on the changing characteristics of Americans.

Perhaps the most important source of data for *American Women* is the Current Population Survey. The CPS is a nationally representative survey of the civilian noninstitutional population aged 15 or older. It is taken monthly by the Census Bureau, collecting information from 50,000 households on employment and unemployment. Each year, the March survey includes a demographic supplement, which is the source of most national data on the characteristics of Americans such as their educational attainment, living arrangements, and incomes.

The American Community Survey is another important source of data for *American Women*. The ACS is an on-going nationwide survey of 250,000 households per month, providing detailed demographic data at the community level. Designed to replace the census long-form questionnaire, the ACS collects data not only for the nation as a whole, but also for regions, states, counties, and metropolitan areas.

To explore changes in attitudes, New Strategist extracted data from the nationally representative General Social Survey of the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center. NORC conducts the biennial survey through face-to-face interviews with an independently drawn, representative sample of 3,000 to 4,000 people aged 18 or older in the United States. The GSS is one of the best sources of attitudinal data on Americans available today.

The spending data in *American Women* are from the 2006 Consumer Expenditure Survey, an ongoing study of the day-to-day spending of American households administered by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Because the BLS collects spending data from households rather than individuals, the spending patterns of women must be gleaned by examining the spending of women who live alone, of married couples, and of single parent families. The great majority of women live in one of these types of households, and their spending is detailed in *American Women*.

The American Time Use Survey is the source of the time use statistics presented in this book. This survey, administered by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, collects data from a nationally representative sample of Americans aged 15 or older by asking them what they did during the previous 24 hours, minute by minute. Time use data reveals the real priorities of Americans, allowing marketers and policymakers to better understand our economy.

The data in the Wealth chapter are from the Survey of Consumer Finances, a triennial survey taken by the Federal Reserve Board. It collects data on the assets, debt, and net worth of American households. The latest data were collected in 2004. As with spending data, wealth data are collected from households rather than individuals. Therefore, researchers must extrapolate the wealth of women from household figures.

*American Women* contains a lengthy table list to help readers locate the information they need. For a more detailed search, use the index at the back of the book. Also in the back of the book is a glossary, which defines most of the terms commonly used in the tables and text and describes the surveys used to gather the information. Researchers who want even more should use the Internet addresses listed in the sources at the bottom of each table to explore original documents.

*American Women* will help you understand the wants and needs of the majority population in the United States. Those wanting to know about the demographics and lifestyles of men should examine New Strategist's companion volume, *American Men: Who They Are and How They Live*, available from [www.newstrategist.com](http://www.newstrategist.com).