



August 27, 2008

## Engaging Unmarried Women II Economy Key to Courting Unmarried Women

**To:** The Progressive Community  
**From:** Greenberg Quinlan Rosner  
Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund

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For progressives, unmarried women are one of the most important groups in this election. They are the largest progressive block of voters in the electorate, representing 26 percent of the voting age population. They are also one of the most loyal, supporting Democrats in the last two elections with 62 percent of the vote and 65 percent, respectively. At the same time, they are under-represented in politics. In 2004, for example, 20 million unmarried women did not vote. Compared to married women, unmarried women are 9 percentage points less likely to register and 13 percentage points less likely to vote. Given the fact that John Kerry won unmarried women by a 62 – 37 percent margin, this effectively left 12 million progressive votes on the table.

There are few more important missions for progressives over the next two months than energizing unmarried women. What that means specifically is addressing their highest priority—the economy—and in a fashion that meets them where they are in terms of how they are leading their lives. For many of these voters, this is not about statistics or whether or not, technically, the country is in a recession. It is about making it pay-check to pay-check.

It is no secret that this election is driven by the economy. It is also no secret the economy plays a particularly prominent role in the political decision-making of key progressive groups, from younger voters to union voters to people of color. However, unmarried women represent arguably one of the most economically stressed groups in the American electorate. By definition, most of these women live on a single-income.

- More than 40 percent have household incomes of \$30,000 a year or less.
- These women earn 56 cents for every dollar that a married man makes.
- They are less likely than married people to have health coverage.

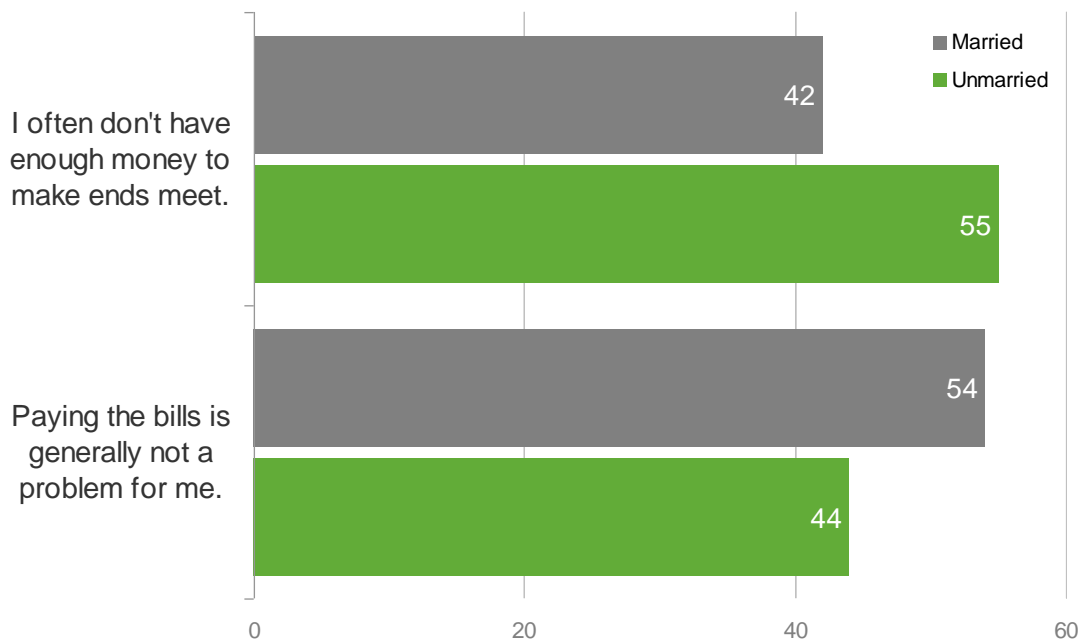
- More than 10 million are single moms with children at home.
- About 25 percent rely on Social Security as their only source of income.

Women’s Voices. Women Vote, the Women’s Voices. Women Vote Action fund and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner have tracked the priorities of unmarried women since 2005. We found these voter’s growing economic concerns preceding the growing economic frustration in the rest of the country. In this respect, unmarried women have served as ‘canary in the coal mine’ for the broader electorate. But is also true that economic anxiety among unmarried women is more acute when compared to married voters.

In April 2008, Women’s Voices. Women Vote commissioned a survey of American women, married and unmarried. This survey painted a dramatically disparate picture of the married and unmarried population. The economic marriage gap emerged in reactions to the statements, “I often don’t have enough money to make ends meet,” versus, “paying bills is generally not a problem for me.” Although a notable number of married women agreed with the former statement, a 24-point gap exists between married and unmarried women on this measure.

**Figure 1: Economic Marital Gap**

*Now I’m going to read you some pairs of statements. As I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views, even if neither is exactly right.*



*\*March 18 - 26 2008 survey of 1007 women.*

When engaging unmarried women on the economy, progressives need to promote changes that can make a difference in these women's lives at the household level. It has to make sense to people struggling to get through the month while keeping their utilities on and convey the proper sense of urgency. That is to say, it is not about the productive rate or trade deficits; it is about health care costs, raising the minimum wage and gas prices.

Note the difference in importance married and unmarried women assign the following proposals. Unmarried women are significantly more likely to place a priority on the kinds of policies that simply would provide them with more money to get by.

**Figure 2: Marriage Gap in Policy Proposals (Percent very important)**

	Married Women	Unmarried Women	Difference (Unmarried – Married)
Expand federal programs for low-income housing assistance to help more families afford to live in safe areas	43	62	+19
Make childcare assistance available to all families who need it.	52	64	+12
Raise the minimum wage again, to \$8.40 an hour.	49	59	+10
Make sure every American has health care insurance and provide choices including the option to stay in employer-provided health care plans, buy private insurance or use a Medicare-style government plan.	71	80	+9
Cracking down on companies that pay women LESS money if they perform THE SAME job as their male colleagues.	65	74	+9
Provide paid family leave to workers who need to take care of a sick family member or newborn baby.	60	68	+8
Increase tax credits and scholarships to make college affordable to anyone who wants to go.	63	70	+7
Make sure every American has health care insurance.	75	82	+7

*\*March 18 - 26 2008 survey of 1007 women.*

In a more recent survey of unmarried women taken last week, these voters identified lowering gas prices as the most helpful economic change (40 percent), followed by lowering the cost of health care (38 percent).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Based on a survey conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner from August 12-18, 2008, and sponsored by the Women's Voices, Women Vote Action Fund. The survey results are based on telephone interviews with a random sample of 500 registered unmarried women. The battleground is defined here as the states of Alaska, Colorado, Iowa, Indiana, Florida, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Wisconsin.

## Conclusion

The progressive margin in 2008 depends on energizing progressive voters. The biggest of these groups is unmarried women and their biggest issue by far is the economy. However, it is not enough to simply raise the economy as one of the many reasons this country needs change. Progressives need to meet unmarried women *where they are* in terms of their own economic lives. This message needs to be about directly improving the economic prospects of these voters and addressing the cost of living.