



# Book What Women Want

## The Global Marketplace Turns Female Friendly

Paco Underhill  
Simon & Schuster, 2010

### Recommendation

Frequent speaker and best-selling author Paco Underhill attempts to answer the vital question, “What do women want?” His purview is not women’s relationships – that’s another book altogether – but rather commerce and, via commerce, social change. He explains that women are reshaping the global marketplace, so businesses that don’t evolve to accommodate them will fall behind. Most of all, Underhill says, women seek “cleanliness, control, safety and considerateness.” A messy dressing room or a poorly lit parking garage may alienate these valuable customers. Through case studies, statistical research, interviews, anecdotes and his own firsthand observations, Underhill identifies how and why women spend money. *BooksInShort* recommends this engaging, witty book to all marketing, advertising and retail professionals. Even those who do not agree with all of Underhill’s opinions and gender-based generalizations will find he presents interesting examples and arguments. Though he sometimes diverges from women-specific topics, even his detours prove fascinating.

### Take-Aways

- Women influence every segment of every industry and affect social change.
- They make many of the decisions about how their families spend money.
- Companies that don’t acknowledge and market to women consumers will fall behind.
- Women seek “cleanliness, control, safety and considerateness” in any environment.
- Housing design has evolved to reflect women’s tastes. Kitchens and bathrooms are no longer utilitarian spaces but rather women’s “playgrounds” and retreats.
- Many of the most popular home design trends incorporate children in some way, save time or energy, or help women multitask.
- More women now travel for business, so hotels are catering to their preferences in “cleanliness, lighting, temperature, color” and safety.
- The emerging popularity of natural foods is largely the result of women’s vigilance about what they feed their families.
- Department stores are evolving as women’s shopping habits change. Retailers are becoming leaner and offering fewer choices, since women have less time to browse.
- Retailers continue to overlook a vital market segment: women in their 50s and older.

### Summary

#### “The Female Factor”

In 2005, in a historic first, women “under the age of 30” in the biggest U.S. cities surpassed men “in earning power.” Across the globe, women are faring better than men in employment trends. In Brazil and the U.S., for example, far more men than women are out of work. Even in higher education, women are “outpacing” men, achieving 140 bachelor degrees for every 100 that men attain. From 1969 to 2000, the number of female graduates increased 157%, but the number of male graduates increased only 39%. As a result of such advances, women are gaining prominence in the global marketplace as new “economic powerhouses.”

“Though women have always worked, the evolution of the female economic powerhouse – the one who can spend money on whatever stuff she wants – is revolutionary, and growing fast.”

If you’re not considering how women perceive and affect your business, then you are doing your company a disservice. Simple details such as a messy dressing room

or a creepy parking lot will alienate these important, influential consumers. To create a “female-friendly” environment, focus on these issues:

- **“Cleanliness”** – Women expect a spotless environment, not only in restaurants, shops, health clubs, hotels and restrooms, but anywhere they spend time.
- **“Control”** – Women want to be able to adjust an environment to suit them. For example, they may wish to move chairs around in a lounge area, so don’t bolt furniture to the floor.
- **“Safety”** – Safety is a priority for most women, and rightfully so. Generally, women are physically smaller than men, so they often feel more vulnerable. Pay careful attention to your “lighting levels” and similar details.
- **“Considerateness”** – Making your product or service accessible for women is crucial. For instance, if your business sells products that are large, heavy or otherwise cumbersome, post a sign informing customers that a staff member will load items into their cars.

“The irony is that, by walking the female path, you end up making things better for women and men.”

Women are leaving their mark on every segment of every industry. They run companies, practice law and medicine, and travel the globe on business. In addition, they continue to act as social directors for their families and influence major decisions about household spending.

## **The Houses, They Are a-Changin’**

Houses are beginning to evolve to reflect shifting consumer demographics. For instance, large, garish “McMansions” are out; female home buyers want a more manageable layout. According to the all-women advisory board of Kennecott Land, a development group, women would also like kitchens with multilevel counters to accommodate children. And they’d favor side-by-side “family bathrooms” that enable them to get ready while watching their kids. Already, women have come a long way toward reshaping their homes “in [their] own image,” particularly their kitchens and bathrooms.

## **Heart and Hearth**

For most U.S. women, the kitchen is the heart of the house. Ever since the “Golden Age of the kitchen appliance” in the 1880s and ’90s, kitchens have been a hub for the newest fixtures and gadgets. A newly “mechanized kitchen” released women homemakers “from the servitude that most had considered the be-all and end-all of their lives.” Appliances grew so important that by the 1930s, designers started planning kitchen layouts around them. Now the kitchen is both the social center and the design showcase of the home. Typically, it opens onto the family’s primary living spaces, such as the den or dining area.

“Many studies prove that time spent in the kitchen has plummeted since the mid-1960s, back when American women spent a weekly average of 13 hours boiling and broiling.”

Kitchens come in all shapes and sizes to meet women’s various needs. Gourmets enjoy huge “megakitchens” with areas dedicated to specific cooking tasks – and filled with an assortment of the latest appliances. Women who are rushed may prefer a kitchen that boasts time- and labor-saving devices.

## **Spa and Retreat**

Once the most utilitarian room in the house, the bathroom has undergone a renaissance of sorts. Now it is a woman’s oasis, her “inner sanctum.” Just as women want their kitchens to be more than workspaces, they want their bathrooms to go beyond practical functionality. They often decorate these rooms with design elements they’ve observed while visiting hotels and restaurants, or while traveling to other lands and experiencing other cultures. And they add extra touches, like more storage space, that make life easier. Thanks to women’s influence, the bathroom has not only grown larger and more elegant, it has also multiplied. Indeed, 25% of homes built in 2005 had at least three bathrooms.

## **Brains and Brawn**

If the kitchen is the heart of the home, the office is its brain. There, among the cables, files, printers, monitors and computers, women organize their work and home lives as well as the lives of their families. The modern home office also serves as a “tech room” for the rest of the family. However, technology is not limited to this space. With wireless internet access, the home office can spill into every room in the house.

“Females have elevated not just the contemporary kitchen, but the bathroom, into places that both recognize and salute their status.”

The home office brings the outside world into women’s “domestic domain.” Simply having a good internet connection lets women access a huge array of functions, such as online banking and shopping, and saves their valuable time. With a click of the mouse, women can review work documents, read their children’s report cards, connect to friends on social media sites like Facebook and buy what they need for their households – including electronics.

“Without the influence of women, there probably wouldn’t be a Whole Foods in the first place.”

Research shows that women are responsible for almost 50% of all electronics purchases. That’s why major electronics stores are going to great lengths to make their retail outlets female-friendly. Changes at Best Buy include more women on the sales floor, a woman’s voice on the loudspeaker and interactive displays designed to attract women shoppers. Its “Geek Squad” offers help with equipment from store to home, including set-up, installation and user education. Best Buy has feminized its store design with soft corners, better lighting and wood fixtures.

“Drugstores are designed around the premise of the mission-driven female as caregiver.”

Like the home office, the home gym enables women to multitask. Having a workout room in the house allows them to make time for their own well-being while staying “present, available and in control” of their families. Exercising at home has the added benefits of being private and expedient. It gives women, who tend to be caretakers of others, the resources and flexibility to care for themselves.

## Home and Away

Maintaining a home goes beyond keeping it neat and clean. Many women have become “tool-belt divas” who can handle home repairs, too. Life experiences, such as living alone, may have impelled such women to become self-sufficient. Or they may simply have a natural interest in how things work. Many likely heard from an early age that they can do anything a man can do. So when a toilet stops flushing or a skylight starts leaking, these women are more likely to take a trip to the hardware store than they are to pay for a professional repair.

“Access to beauty is no longer based on mass, class or prestige. That stratified world is over.”

Until the 1960s, society generally disapproved of women traveling alone for business. People often viewed solo female travelers as members of a “suspect profession.” Now that the world has become more global, women are no longer strangers to professional travel. With rare exceptions, hotels now cater to their preferences in “cleanliness, lighting, temperature, color” and safety.

## Sin and Splurge

What do women do when they’re not busy taking care of everyone else? They’re just as likely to indulge as men are. Take gambling, for example. Men founded most U.S. casinos, but women now make up a large piece of the gambling pie. As a result, casino owners are striving to make them feel welcome and comfortable, for instance, by creating slot machines that are “less about gambling and more about entertainment,” since women prefer slots to table games.

## About the Author

**Paco Underhill** is founder and CEO of Envirosell, a research and consulting company. He wrote the bestsellers *Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping* and *Call of the Mall: The Geography of Shopping*. Underhill is also a columnist and speaker.

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