Pocketbook Power

How to Reach the Hearts and Minds of Today’s Most Coveted Consumers—Women

Bernice Kanner

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The serpent in the Garden of Eden knew it first. Marketers caught on centuries later. Women are the ones to reach. Since Eve’s time they’ve been the gatekeepers in the kingdom of consumer spending, the ultimate decision makers. Yet only recently have marketers really understood the extent to which women figuratively wear the pants. The implications of that realization have transformed the marketing world and, by extension, our cultural landscape.

A handful of professional media watchers still wring their hands over (and earn their livelihood from pointing out) “disturbing” images of anorexic, airbrushed, idealized beauties whom they claim drive normal women to compare and despair. Others whine about the relative invisibility of women on marketers’ radar screens. Still others concede that women are represented all right—but complain that it is largely lip service or tokenism.

Leaf through a stack of magazines or surf the Web or TV, and sure as a robotic telemarketer interrupting dinner, you’ll come upon pitches using women as pinups or promiscuous props. The Advertising Women of New York’s (AWNY’s) annual Good, Bad & Ugly awards found no shortage of contenders for the 2003 Grand Ugly. All too many marketers pressed “the stereotypical default button on...
men’s fantasies, featuring bimbos and degradation,” said Nancy Axthelm, executive vice president at Grey Worldwide and one of the AWNY judges.

Audacious, loutish ads crafted by the clueless, however, are either an endangered species or intentionally designed to titillate men. Men do, after all, still buy most of the beer and vacuum cleaners. What about all those perfect women in “aspirational” ads? Research suggests that most of us like to see them: We recognize the fantasy—and buy into it. And when we don’t share the fantasy or we object to it, more often than not the advertiser gets the message and changes the pitch. Instead of 15-year-olds slathering on antiaging skin creams, these days, mature (albeit still beguiling) middle-agers are demonstrating the products. This is so because purchasers did not relate to the previous presenters.

Before I had children, I longed for a son, not because I had a special affinity for males but because I knew life would be easier for a he-child than for a she-child. My prenatal yearning is still common around the world—and in America. Historically, being a born a girl meant joining a sorority of second-class citizens. Now that I have a child of each gender, I know history is being rewritten to be “her story” as well, perhaps more so in this century. As an “advertising anthropologist,” I see marketing reflecting these changes.

Indeed, the Y chromosome is embattled today. In his recent book, *Y: The Descent of Men*, Dr. Steve Jones, a professor of genetics at University College in London, contends that men have devolved to become the “second sex . . . a mere remnant of its once mighty structure.” Writing in the *New York Times*, columnist Maureen Dowd contended that for years, men, feeling clumsy and insecure, have fretted “they may be rendered unnecessary if women get financial and biological independence, learning how to reproduce and refinance without them.” One result is that men are becoming more feminized, thinking it is “better to be an X chromosome than an ex-chromosome.”

On average, three sex change operations are performed every day in America. Almost all are male-to-female transformations. The
figures that represent Liberty, Justice, and Wrath are female. There is no Mr. America. Granted, Cupid, Father Time, and Uncle Sam are guys, but many suspect that Santa Claus is a woman. How else could the red elf pull off that huge, organized, warm, fuzzy, nurturing social event called Christmas? And Dan Brown’s Da Vinci Code jolted readers with its notion of feminist divinity.

After all, it wasn’t that long ago that legendary adman David Ogilvy chided marketers for the ubiquitous practice of talking down to women. “The consumer is not a moron; she’s your wife,” he berated those who patronized or discounted them, those who misconstrued men’s higher paychecks to mean greater spending clout. Yet even Ogilvy could not predict how pocketbook power dominates the world of commerce. It decides not only what and who to buy (politically and entertainment-wise) but also when and where to buy it (online, boutiques, department stores, catalogs). Women are even dictating to retailers what they’ll pay.

The pocketbook holding this power must be pretty capacious: Women, who comprise just over 51 percent of the U.S. population, control $6 trillion in buying power annually, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis. This is 600 times the amount of gold stowed in Fort Knox. Statistics compiled by the Women’s Entertainment Network, the sales promotion agency Frankel & Co., and others suggest that all told women make 88 percent of the retail purchases in America. They buy:

- 53 percent of all stocks
- 51 percent of all sports equipment
- 66 percent of all personal computers (PCs) and 51 percent of consumer electronics
- 47 percent of hardware and home improvement materials
- 85 percent of toilet tissue
- 81 percent of groceries
- 75 percent of over-the-counter drugs
- 90 percent of greeting cards
- 94 percent of all home furnishings
• 46 percent of men’s wear
• 60 percent of flowers
• 65 percent of all cars
• 80 percent of all health care
• 88 percent of medical insurance
• 60 percent of self-help books

Four of every five homes in America have been selected by a woman (Mediamark Research, Inc.), as have 7 of every 10 appliances (Grey Advertising). Women handle 75 percent of family finances (Publicis), initiate 65 percent of divorces (although their standard of living usually declines after the split, whereas their husband’s rises), and write 80 percent of all checks. Demographers expect that by 2020, through inheritance, marriage, salary, or crook, women will control most of the money in America.

Already, 43 percent of people with assets over $500,000 are women. Men still earn more overall, but the gap keeps narrowing—from 68 cents to every dollar in 1985 to 75 cents in 2003 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). In addition, the BLS notes, one in every four wives earns more than her husband.

**Worker Bees**

Three of five women work outside the home. By 2005, women will comprise 62 percent of the nation’s workforce, with increasing numbers on the upper rungs. In 2002, almost half of all managers were women—up from one-third in 1983. Catalyst’s 2002 census shows that nearly 16 percent of Fortune 500 corporate officers are women, up from 12.5 percent in 2000. Almost 8 percent of them hold C level posts, up from 2 percent in 1995. Moreover, in 16 percent of large corporations, women head the in-house legal teams.

Besides scaling the corporate ladder, women are demonstrating momentum by swarming into heretofore male-dominated professions such as engineering and accounting and inching into enclaves such as architecture, computer analysis, construction, aviation, and
even pest control. Roughly 2 of every 100 electricians and 1 of every 100 aircraft mechanics are female.

At the same time, women are also leaving corporate America at twice the rate of men, flummoxed by obstacles blocking their climbs in big companies, and becoming entrepreneurs, says Myra Hart, professor at Harvard Business School. Every 60 seconds nowadays a woman opens a new business. Collectively, women start businesses at 1.5 times the rate of men, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. One of every 11 American women now owns a business. Gender-wise, women own more than one-fourth of all the privately held firms in America, and by 2005, they will own more than 40 percent. The number of companies owned at least half by women is growing nearly twice as fast as all companies, says the nonprofit Center for Women’s Business Research.

Many more small-company owners are considering their daughters as their successors, according to a study by Babson College, because of their degrees (half of all business bachelor’s degrees and 40 percent of master’s degrees now go to women) and qualifications, and with female CEOs in the spotlight, it’s certainly not a choice from left field. Women also are often better at team building and communications, research shows, skills that are now valued more in business.

Indeed, two-thirds of adults think that their moms would do at least as good a job as their current CEO in dealing with employees, 62 percent expect that they would handle the corporate finances at least as well as their actual boss, and four of five think that they would do the job more ethically, according to staffing firm Ajilon Office.

McCann-Erickson has been, historically, a man’s agency. I wanted the agency to add estrogen for people to “get in touch with their female side.” I’m not suggesting men should weep in meetings, but they should embrace what we usually think of as female attributes: teamwork, relationship building, collaboration and empathy. That’s the new paradigm for effective
leadership, and mothers and wives have been doing this since time began. We’re still competitive, but now we compete as to who is more collaborative.

Nina DiSesa, chairman, CEO, McCann-Erickson, New York

Not only do women collectively have the means, but they also have it longer than men. The average life expectancy of women is 79 years, compared with 72 for men. It is no surprise, then, that 80 percent of the residents at Sunrise Assisted Living are female. Men start out numerically superior and stay that way until their mid-20s. By age 30, the balance has tipped: There are 99 men for every 100 women. The gap widens with age. Three of every four octogenarians are female. Most are healthy, active, and handling their own business affairs.

Marketers of every ilk follow the money. The TV networks and newsweeklies have sniffed the scent coming from a different direction and are courting women, as are the makers of cars and truck, tires and motorcycles, scotch and screwdrivers, tech and telecoms, and even cigars, guns, and condoms. Women still rule the traditional female domains centered on home and hearth—food, furniture, and fashion. Now, however, they are suffering equal-opportunity heart attacks, enduring stress-related commuting, and watching Sunday sports. (Almost half the fans on Super Bowl Sunday are female, as are 40 percent of NASCAR buffs.)

Marketers weren’t motivated by female activism: Women call or write their congresspersons or newspaper editors far less than men do. Rather, they’ve been drawn by the most obvious and compelling force: pocketbook power.

Instead of packaging “male” products in pretty pink boxes, marketers are creating wares with real points of difference or benefits. In 1996, not one product targeted specifically to women was launched. By 2001, there were 40, according to Mintel International Group, a new-product tracking company. The number was even higher in 2002.

When PepsiCo concocted fruit-flavored Aquafina Essentials, it spiked the bottled water with woman-friendly minerals and vitamins. The flavoring and packaging of Crest’s Rejuvenating Effects tooth-
paste were designed for women by women (its three marketing managers were known inside Procter & Gamble as the “Chicks in Charge”). The ergonomic oval head and curved handle of Gillette’s Venus razors were calculated to easily fit in a woman’s hand. Hooker Furniture Company makes desks with higher work platforms to accommodate women who often cross their legs when working, a locking compartment for a purse, and a small velvet box so that earrings aren’t misplaced when a woman answers the phone. And Sherwin-Williams’ “Twist and Pour” Dutch Boy paint can was intended to be easy enough for finely manicured hands to open.

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<th>Women Stats (And We Don’t Mean 36-24-36)</th>
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<td>• Women are the better-educated gender.</td>
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<td>• In a recent year, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, women earned 55 percent of bachelor’s and master’s degrees, 59 percent of associate degrees, and 40 percent of doctoral degrees. They also earned 53 percent of undergraduate degrees in biology and 46 percent in math and statistics. Women have earned more than one-fourth of the doctoral degrees in science for 30 years. Thirty percent of all lawyers and 42 percent of associates at large law firms are women, as are nearly half of students entering law school.</td>
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<td>• The U.S. Department of Education expects college enrollment to be 57 percent female in 2007.</td>
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<td>• Sigmund Freud got famous asking what women want; there’s a good chance women will be the ones answering. Some 48 percent of psychologists are female, according to the American Psychological Association, and 75 percent of those earning bachelor’s degrees in psychology are women, as are 66 percent of those advanced degrees in the field.</td>
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<td>• Today more than 45 percent of new students at U.S. medical schools are women, as are 38 percent of all</td>
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medical residents, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges. And many more medical schools are enrolling more women than men in incoming classes.

Linguist Deborah Tannen took the publishing world by storm a few years back by articulating the differences in the ways the genders communicate. What is surprising is that everyone already knew it. Study after study shows that men and women perceive things differently, prioritize differently, and respond to messages differently. Want to motivate men? Try making competitive performance claims such as bigger, better, and best. Men like maximum amps, the newest models, and the highest return. Women, on the other hand, like to connect. Show them how something makes them a member of the sorority, solves a real or perceived problem, or magnifies the meaning in their lives. “You can’t ‘sell’ to women so much as ‘connect’ with them,” notes Carrie McCament, senior vice president and founder of Frank about Women. Indeed, Tannen claims that “women speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy, while men speak and hear a language of status and independence.”

According to the International Mass Retail Association, brand characteristics and personal assistance from store personnel carry more weight with women than with men. Women value the “Made in the United States” label more than men do, and they pay more attention to coupons and promotions. RoperASW found that two of three women but only 15 percent of men are likely to switch brands because the company sponsors a cause they support.

Marketers recognize these gender differences, of course, but some worry about a price for honoring them. Years ago, advertisers refrained from casting blacks in commercials, fearful they would alienate white consumers. A similar trepidation prevents many manufacturers from “painting their brand pink.” (Various research studies suggest that women also spurn pink for being condescending or overpriced.) Manufacturers fret that overtly pursuing women will squelch men’s appetite for their brands. In fact, almost the opposite
actually happens. When companies tinker with their products to meet women’s higher expectations and do it without pandering, they please their male customers as well.

The trick, of course, is to deliver a message that cuts through clutter, convinces with charm and grace, and connects solidly with a fast-moving target. Women are evolving from a time when they were less willing “to subsume themselves or limit their ambitions to make life more congenial for men,” says Andrew Hacker, a professor of political science at Queens College in New York. Even juggling is an antiquated term, suggests Anne Marshall, cofounder of WomanTrend, a Washington, D.C.–based market research and consulting firm. “My mother juggled. I’m choosing.”

Women may choose to be full-time moms or serial careerists, to have children or jobs early, late, or not at all. They may choose to opt in or opt out. The new normalcy is that they are the ones choosing. Of course, their choices are greatly influenced by the economy, the political scene, and what’s happening in the larger world and in their smaller, immediate one. Overall, the zeitgeist has created what J. Walker Smith, president of Yankelovich Partners research firm, calls “an undercurrent of anxiety . . . and an intense craving for comfort and connection.” Women now are more interested in spending time with family and friends than spending money in malls and outlets. Increasingly, they recognize “housework” as something you do that no one notices unless you don’t do it—and cooking from scratch as a Stone Age art from the days when big breasts were more important than thin thighs. Opinion Research Corporation found that almost half have demoted cleaning not because they have less time but because they feel there’s more to life than cleaning.

Women are also more resistant to aggressive hucksterism. Advertising has to be “cute like an invited guest with something of value to offer,” says Roy Spence, Jr., president of the GSD&M Agency in Austin, Texas. The offer must go beyond the obvious. Southwest Airlines is more than a seat to a destination, he says. It’s about freedom. Wal-Mart is about democratization. It lets anyone buy the same
things as rich people. “Krispy Kreme is in the ‘magic moment’ busi-
ness, and the U.S. Air Force is in the winning business,” he says.

Finding the right words to accomplish all this is no easy task. Marketers are learning to watch their language. General Motors, for
example, meant well but executed a Catera commercial poorly, offending the very target GM was trying to woo. In the medieval fairy
tale presented in its 1997 Super Bowl commercial for “the Caddy that
zigs,” Cindy Crawford played a beautiful but bored princess who
wanted some magic in her life. The wizard she consulted advises her
to get a Catera. Women (including GM’s own female executives) were
offended by the term princess, the unsubtle sexual innuendo, and
Crawford’s dominatrix outfit of black leather micro skirt and thigh-
high leather go-go boots.

Marketers know that in today’s world the fairytale prince may
never materialize. Thus the “princess” will have to make her own way.
More and more marketers are selling cars on safety, comfort, and style
rather than on torque or wheelbase; software on solving problems and
making connections rather than on state-of-the-art technology; and
hotels on ambiance and experience rather than address and prestige.
Somehow, Charles Revson’s practice of ignoring calls from the bank
president or ad agency while hustling to take one from a woman
whose lipstick had smeared doesn’t seem so loony. He used to ration-
alize this seeming oddity, explaining that women are the real bosses.

Pundits say that understanding the “fairer sex” is an older pur-
suit than questioning the meaning of life. There is a joke in market-
ing circles about the guy who asks his genie to build him a bridge.
The genie tells him it’s too difficult a task. Okay, says the guy. “I mar-
ket to women. Tell me what they want.” The genie snaps back, “Do
you want two lanes or four?”

Clearly, women are reshaping the world in which we live. As
their roles and attitudes evolve, they are creating extraordinary
opportunities for smart marketers who recognize this and struggle
to come up with new ways to reach them. Who are these new women,
what do they want, and what is the language to court them—to touch
their minds and hearts and ultimately their wallets?
Women Have Changed the Landscape

Men don’t much like it, but they can’t deny it: Our culture has been “Oprahfied.” “Hard” news is squeezed into ever smaller spaces on a page or program dominated by human interest or entertainment stories. On the nightly news, Peter Jennings may report the latest findings on Botox along with the latest dispatch from Basra. The newsweeklies’ coverage of breast cancer, bikini cuts, and bilingual education deliver the same message—that women are the audience. They’re the swing vote in elections, the force behind the lineup change of the Olympics, and the reason why Sears went soft.

Morning is the only part of the day in which network TV audience size and profits are growing. Here, female viewers outnumber males by as much as three to one. CBS’s Early Show booted cohost Bryant Gumbel because women found him cold and standoffish.

On the sports scene, the jock and TV anchor delivering the sports story are as likely to wear bras as athletic cups. The “boy binge” of Sunday afternoon sports is now coed. And while the Super Bowl has been hijacked by the distaff sex—43 percent of its viewers are female—women have their own Super Bowl of sorts: The Academy Awards is known as the “Super Bowl for Women.” Like the big game, this media event charges top ad rates, but two out of three of people
watching are women. This is not lost on advertisers, who you’d think would be after men. In 2003, American Express advertised at the star-studded awards for the sixth straight year, after bailing from the Super Bowl in 1999. In addition, Home Depot, home of Joe Toolbelt, advertised on the Academy Awards for the first time but has never run an ad on the Super Bowl.

Sports is a welcome diversion for women because the texture of their lives has become knottier since September 11, 2001. The terrorist attacks just have morphed “SUV moms” (formerly “soccer moms”) into “security moms.” Women who wouldn’t think of owning a gun now approve the pilot in a commercial airline cockpit packing one. And the number of women enrolled in the National Rifle Association’s courses has multiplied. Polls consistently show that women feel painfully vulnerable—and willing to forfeit some of their civil liberties to feel safer. Their support for defense and governmental strength is buoying the Republican Party, President Bush’s chief political advisor, Karl Rove, has crowed.

Politicians have long sought the female vote. In 2002, when Thomas Birmingham campaigned in Massachusetts, he promised a largely female crowd that he would be “the greatest feminist governor” in the state’s history and pointed to his accomplishments in day care, education, and health care as evidence. Candidate Steve Grossman cited his record of appointing women to key posts and his support for math and science training to prepare them in industries where women are underrepresented. Shannon O’Brien pointed to the investment training program she initiated to help women manage money.

Many women are focused on managing their own political campaigns. More women (six) serve as governors now than at any time before (one of the four elected in 2002 is Michigan’s Jennifer Granholm, with three children under age 12). Janet Napolitano is Arizona’s third female chief executive in little more than a decade. Conservative North Carolina elected centrist Elizabeth Dole to replace angry Jesse Helms as senator. California’s Nancy Pelosi leads the House Democrats, the first time a woman in either party has held
the top post. The 108th Congress included 63 women representatives and 14 female senators. Madeleine K. Albright, the first woman Secretary of State in 1997, has been succeeded in the inner sanctum by Condoleezza Rice. Hillary Rodham Clinton’s book sold more than 1 million copies in its early days, fanning speculation that she would run for president in 2008. Most people expect that a woman will occupy the Oval Office by 2012.

Women who entered the political pipeline serving on city councils, school boards, and state legislatures are moving into congressional and governors’ offices, notes Ellen Malcolm of EMILY’s List, which helps finance female Democratic candidates. Regardless of party, women in office are likelier to concern themselves with health, childcare, and education issues more than crime and the economy, research from Rutgers University’s Center for American Women and Politics shows. And they are likely to stumble on the same pothole: mistakenly telling voters what great moms they are when voters fear that they will put their family first and their constituents second, says Republican media consultant Bob Farrell.

Outside the political arena women are changing the way the world works. By pushing for alternative work arrangements (job sharing, in-office day care, telecommunicating, and flextime instead of 9 to 5 rigidity), they are humanizing the workplace more than feminizing it. Roger Herman and Joyce Gioia, coauthors of Lean & Meaningful: A New Culture for Corporate America, expect more office coffee bars and plant-festooned common areas with comfy sofas and mellow music as companies try to become more homelike.

This is hardly to say that women are all about bouquets and curlicues. They are also changing the hard-line military landscape. In a 2003 “we’ve been waiting for you” commercial for the U.S. Air Force, the family member who routinely repairs the malfunctioning satellite dish finds those skills a good fit for the Air Force’s Space Command. The twist: The “repairman” is a she.

The Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Marines are still looking for a few good men. However, since the military went all volunteer in 1973, it has started looking for some good women too. One
in every five new recruits is female. Already, 15 percent of active-duty military personnel are women—versus 11 percent during the first Gulf War. Women make up 19 percent of the Air Force, according to the Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation in Arlington, Virginia, and 15.3 percent of the Army, 14.4 percent of the Navy, 10.3 percent of the Coast Guard, and 5.7 percent of the Marine Corps. High-tech, sophisticated equipment has changed the nature of warfare: Women now fly fighter aircraft and serve aboard combat ships.

Even before America was officially America, women fought for it. Without official recognition, they carried water, acted as saboteurs, and nursed on Revolutionary War battlefields. They were wounded and killed in the Civil War and World War I, were demobilized after that war ended, and recruited again for World War II. Almost 10,000 served in Vietnam and more than 40,000 in the first Gulf War. One in seven soldiers deployed in Iraq is female.

An all-volunteer military means that marketing must do what conscription had done before. It means that instead of a stick, the forces must entice with carrots. In an ad in Downbeat magazine, the Army enticed recruits with the opportunity to continue to study music, travel, and jam with other first-rate musicians. The Navy makes its sea life sound adventurous and glamorous: “It’s not just a job; it’s a flight exercise in Hawaii, the Caribbean and Hong Kong.”

Ads that overtly court women veer from the macho image the services have long cultivated. Natalie Ortiz, a 22-year-old Army specialist, loves pathology, medicine, and science. She is profiled in an “Army of One” ad. Instead of the steely Marine of old, a recent Marine Corps ad showed a curly-haired woman musing about her future.

Uncle Sam also waged a persuasion war to convince “reticent mothers” who have “aspirations, hopes, dreams and ambitions for their children” to endorse their enlistment, says Air Force Major Joe Allegretti, who works for the Defense Department’s Joint Advertising Market Research and Studies Program. Ads featuring veterans describing how military experience helped anchor their civilian lives (teaching them stamina and follow-through, for example) aim to get the gatekeeper to sanction her kid’s enrollment.
Women today are more interested in finances, more willing to talk about and explore their sexuality, and more comfortable pursuing indulgence, says Madelyn Hochstein, president of DYG, Inc. From cigars to bubble bath, if it’s fun, it’s worth pursuing. Women have made the kitchen more a place to indulge a hobby than to pursue a daily grind and the supermarket not just a food distributor but also a caterer.

Women are also changing the way America shops. Just as network TV has lost ground with women over the past decade, so has loyalty to brands—especially with parity products and those used furthest from their faces. One recent study found that 28 percent of women say that they are not at all picky about brands and that they switch frequently. This lack of steadfastness is expected to grow.

Women today are also “convenience addicts.” Their desire to get it done and move on has given rise to 24-hour shopping, catalogs, fast food, and double-duty products. It has meant the finale for “three squares a day,” replaced by a movable feast of dashboard dining.

Another change is the way marketers aim for men. Many categories where men are the principal buyers use “female cues,” says Alan Treadgold, director of research at the Leo Burnett ad agency. “Home entertainment systems are increasingly being sold on the basis of so-called female attributes—the environment of the store, level of service and other intangibles instead of gadgetry and technical features. Car marketers are emphasizing the people driving—and what they’re experiencing—rather than the car’s specifications.”

For years, all deodorant ads said was that this one works for 12 hours, this one for 18, and this one for 36, said Diggi Tompson, North American brand director for Unilever’s Axe. “That was the wrong conversation.” In zany introductory ads, a young woman sprayed Axe on a mannequin, which ended up arousing her comically. Her boyfriend charges onto the set and knocks the mannequin’s head off (“Roger! We were just talking!”).

Women also have changed what they are shopping for in men. “They want a lot more from men than ever before,” says DYG’s Madelyn Hochstein. Among the performance standards by which women are judging prospective mating material are appearance, sexuality,
and provider of fun, romance, and sex. Provider of security and money has dropped way down, although achievement and success are important status symbols, says Hochstein.

Many women have stopped shopping. The number of American women living alone has doubled during the past 20 years, to 43 million, and they are no longer putting their lives “on hold” until they have settled down with a husband. “In the United States, more than half of single women own their own homes. That means they’re the ones checking out power tools, purchasing homeowners insurance, choosing the brand of snow tires,” says Ira Matathia, managing director of Euro RSCG.

They are also the ones to credit for making the hospitality industry hospitable. Women have always made the vacation plans; now they represent close to half of all business travelers, according to Westin Hotels & Resorts. They have literally brought hotels out of the dark ages, transforming their atmosphere, amenities, menus, and service style.

Another societal reverberation is the new androgyny, a move from gender gap to gender overlap with unisex clothes, haircuts, parenting, entertainment, and gender-neutral dating etiquette. The days when a guy couldn’t tell a washer from a dryer are history. Husbands put in more than twice the hours on household chores than they did a generation ago, says John Robinson, a time-use expert at the University of Maryland. Men are also more involved with their kids; Koala says that its diaper-changing tables are as likely to be found in men’s public bathrooms as in women’s. And Mediamark Research says that men buy almost one in four frozen breakfasts, canned stews, nondiet colas, wart removers, and shampoo.

Keeping up appearances—and suffering for beauty—has gone gender-neutral. While women have embraced “mannish” pleasures, men have become more feminized, interested in celebrities and health, family issues, education, eating disorders, and cosmetic surgery—topics that once made up the “women’s pages.” (The number of cosmetic surgeries performed on men in the United States has tripled since 1997, according to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery.)
Many stoic, self-denying, modest straight men know the difference between volumizing conditioners and botanical ingredients. They are not gay or bisexual so much as “metrosexual” and are led by British soccer star David Beckham, who sports sarongs and nail polish. (Even Harrison Ford wears an earring.)

Men buy skin-care items (sales have risen 10 percent each year in the past 5 years) and makeup (Menaji’s mascara is called “lash gel”; its blush is called “contour”). Tampa Bay Buccaneer defensive halfback Ronde Barber figures that he spends more than $400 a month on honey-almond body polishes, minty pedicures, facials, and body scrubs. Guys whose dads drew the line at Aqua Velva are getting microdermabrasion, pedicures, eyebrow shaping, Botox injections, and body-hair waxing. They are visiting hairdressers (not barbers) and wine bars (not pubs). They spurn harsh soap but spend mirror time smoothing, painting, conditioning, glossing, masking, and scenting themselves with the new “just for men” cleansers, moisturizers, hair-styling serums and gels, sunscreens, and depilatories that have emerged. They shop at boutiques, exercise at the gym instead of play a sport, and wonder which pair of Bruno Magli shoes to wear. They understand thread count, manners, and pedicures and have leafed through Condé Nast’s new shopping magazine for men.

One in four spa visitors is now male, so spas are trying to exfoliate their image as female retreats. They are providing big-screen TVs (tuned to sports), huskier scents (rosemary and mint in lieu of lemon grass, orange, and sage, which men find too sweet), manlier nomenclature (the Turnberry Isle Resort spa in Florida calls its regime “golf conditioning,” and the Rancho Bernardo Inn’s spa offers the “sports massage”), and heartier food (forget asparagus spears; Red Mountain Spa in Ivins, Utah, serves carnivorous buffets and “Call of the Wild” dinner entrées of rattlesnake and caribou).

Despite the feminization, marketers go all out to make sure that men know that their products are manly. The grooming aids come in sleek black packages or other rugged looks instead of pastels and florals. Ads for Suave for Men personal care equipment overtly set them apart from women’s products. Two couples are chatting at a
table when one man invites the other to join him going to the restroom. En route, they chatter about the new haircut one of them got as their women look on, dumbfounded. “You’re not a woman,” interrupts a voiceover.

Interestingly, many of these male skin care products such as Nivea for Men advertise in “women’s” magazines. Ads for Glamour claim that its readers spend more on men’s health and beauty aids than the mostly male readers of GQ and Details combined.

The Al Bundys out there still beat their chests, brag about football, and engage in dodgy virility rituals. They have been driven to male-bonding enclaves, to zapping (with so little to watch now), and to the bawdy bad-boy “guyness” of “laddie culture.” Saturated with Neanderthal doo-doo jokes and scantily clad bouncy babes, laddie culture is evident in such magazines as Maxim and such TV programs as Comedy Central’s The Man Show.

Marian Salzman, strategy director at the Euro RSCG ad agency, calls the “I am man; hear me roar, belch, guzzle” movement an in-your-face pushback against “the antiseptic dimensions of politically correct living . . . soft guys eating quiche and loving it.” Yet she warns that it is not a backlash against women. Rather, it is a façade for men behind which to hide their confusion about what it is to be a man today.

Men’s confusion is understandable considering how the seismic changes they’ve triggered have undermined the very soil on which men, indeed, everyone, stands.
Instead of “I am special,” the mantra of women today is “I am me.” Instead of going public, women are focused on privacy. According to Yankelovich & Partners, women are seeking fulfillment on their own terms.

As a rule, women are no longer shooting for superwoman status nor whining, “Woe is me.” Instead, they are playing the hand dealt them and looking for ways to make things happen. DYG identified four aspirations of today’s women. They want control, appreciation or respect, love, and meaning. However, there are two other critical components: happiness, as in “girls just wanna have fun,” and good enough, that is, editing out, settling in, and accepting who they are and that good enough is often better than perfection. In other words, women want CHARGE:

Control
Harmony and love/relationships
Amusement/fun
Respect
Greatness/meaning/spirituality
Enough
What the Wife of Bath Knew: Control

A few years ago, researchers at the McCann-Erickson ad agency were stumped. Combat, an insecticide that came in neat plastic trays and killed roaches quickly with no mess, seemed just what the doctor ordered.

Yet Combat sat on store shelves while Raid sold and sold. The great mystery was solved when McCann-Erickson asked heavy users—downtrodden women in the humid South—to draw a roach and tell a story about it. Virtually all depicted the bug as a man who comes round when he wants something and leaves once he’s gotten it. The women never said so directly, but Raid let them watch the roach—that is, their man—squirm and suffer. Raid gave them a feeling of control and an outlet for their hostility that Combat could not.

Study after study of happy people reveals that they share one characteristic, a sense of control of their lives, says David Myers, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. The Wife of Bath knew this, and for many women, “The Wife of Bath” was the most significant of Chaucer’s tales. While women-as-victim may have worked once when women really were diminished, the model today is women in charge.

Indeed, the research firm DYG found that an equal number of women think that they have the greatest influence on their own lives as who think that God and fate combined do. Women want to be thought of as competent, capable, and in control of their lives, says Madeline Hochstein.

Traditionally, women have been “in charge” at home. And they overwhelmingly still run their households:

- 76 percent do most of the laundry.
- 73 percent do most of the cooking.
- 70 percent do most of the housecleaning.
- 67 percent do most of the grocery shopping.
- 56 percent pay most of the bills.
Now they are also taking charge of their destinies, choosing their clothes, careers, and lifestyles. They compromise more out of love and less out of duty.

Women are taking control of the money. According to DYG, 83 percent of women claim that they are assuming more financial responsibility than ever before. Seventy percent swear that they would never let their husbands handle their joint finances alone. More than half have their own money stashed, apart from what they share with their mates.

Sometimes, wresting control of a situation is costly. Twenty-eight percent of women have quit a job or left a stressful situation to regain their footing. Two in five have pushed for more scheduling flexibility at work. One in three has transferred positions, and another 12 percent have turned down promotions to regain control.

Rather than waiting by the phone for the guy to call, women are directing the course of relationships, comfortable as pursuers as well as pursued. And they are raising the standards on what they require from prospective mates. Eighty-eight percent admit that they have raised the bar on what constitutes partner material. Achievement and financial security are a given. So is royal treatment. Two of three women say that they would only pair up with someone who treats them like a queen. At the same time, women are much less concerned about a partner’s looks than they used to be.

However, they are concerned about their own looks—and are having their lips plumped, their fat liposuctioned, and their smiles whitened, brightened, and rightened. They are also calling the shots on the health of their bodies. Seven of 10 women say that they will solicit their doctors’ opinions and then evaluate the information they have gathered and write their own prescription, choosing among conventional Western surgery, herbal remedies, and even acupuncture.

Women are also organizing their personal lives and the stuff in it. Cleaning may have lost its zest, but organization and the control that it brings are third behind losing weight and having fun among
women’s main goals in life, says Cathy Rings, vice president of marketing at Rubbermaid. “Life is so complicated now that we increasingly try to simplify it for greater control.” In a recent commercial, women whose mates spent an unauthorized night out with the boys drop their guys’ gear out the window. The possessions of the one whose wife used Rubbermaid containers remained intact; the others were not so lucky.

Of course, women know that there is a lot they can’t control—sickness, death, accidents, and even how their kids turn out—but where they can exert an influence, they are determined to do so. Maternal micromanagement may be as great a trend (and threat to kids today) as maternal neglect, with moms programming their children’s lives to leave as little as possible to chance. Control starts in utero (with scheduled C-sections) and even before with in vitro and other gynecologic interventions to conquer infertility. Women are determined to control the sweet hereafter too. A third of women with young children admit that they have spied on their babysitters.

Harmony and Love/Relationships

Who, being loved, is poor?

Oscar Wilde

To love another person is to see the face of God.

Les Miserables

The Eskimos have 52 words for snow because it is so special to them. There ought to be as many for love.

Margaret Atwood

Since when were practical and romantic mutually exclusive? Women still believe that love makes the world go round, but today they are no longer the sleeping princesses. They are activist-crusaders.
Because women can support themselves, they don’t need to marry for money or security. Now they marry for love.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Wish List</th>
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<td>Love may be blind, but it’s not deaf. Among the biggest wishes that women have is that their mates listen better. They also wish that their partners would help out more. However, just 16 percent wished that their partners would be better lovers.</td>
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And marry they do. Despite rumblings about marriage, 70 percent of women still consider it the best arrangement available. Just 4 percent value their independence so much that they spurn any serious commitment.

Romance isn’t the only kind of love they crave, however. They yearn for familial love. For 88 percent of women, their children are their greatest joy, and the loving bond they share is their greatest source of happiness. (Sixty-one percent who don’t have children admit that they often wish that they did.) It is more the love they feel for their children than from their children that they find fulfilling. Women say that this connection with their children teaches them how to connect with the rest of the world. Four of five credit motherhood with pushing their own needs out of first place. And 61 percent say that their willingness to sacrifice for their children has made them stronger, better people.

Women also know that when Bette Midler rasped, “You gotta have friends,” she told the truth. The flimsy *Divine Secrets of the Ya Ya Sisterhood* became a hit because of its substantive premise about the importance of friendships. The average woman shares her life with six close friends. Only 2 percent have no best friend. Surprisingly, as women age, they amass more friends. Two in five who call themselves happily married confide secrets to friends that they do not even share with their husbands. Hallmark has plugged into this girlfriends phenomenon by creating a line of Celebration of Women cards.
Amusement and Fun

Ever notice how “What the hell?” is always the right decision?

Marilyn Monroe

It’s not just girls who want to have fun: It’s grown women too. Study after study shows that whatever they’re doing, women are more focused on enjoying the journey than on just getting to their destination, says DYG’s Madelyn Hochstein.

Marketers are trying to make those journeys amusing and sensory. Apple made its iMacs colorful, stylish, and easy to use. “Somber” fragrances have gone playful. Once serious broadcasters now offer lively banter. And translucent plastic jellies in fuchsia and turquoise have made a comeback from the 1980s for the simple reason that they are fun.

Ikea’s giant new stores—one occupies 30 acres in the Washington, D.C., area—propel shoppers around a racetrack-style showroom where living rooms blend into kitchens, which make way for work areas and so on, showing all its 80,000 items. “A big part of Ikea’s winning formula is the fun of the shopping experience itself,” says Christopher Gunter, president of the Retail Group in Seattle. Women crawl into the display beds with no salesman huffing at them, a supervised play area replicates a Swedish farmhouse and forest for the kids, and you can walk in, get a couch, and walk out instantly gratified. By making furniture “a fashion object rather than an heirloom, Ikea gives us permission to buy something that will wear out and that’s OK” because it wasn’t expensive, Gunter said.

Indulgences such as spas, bubble baths, champagne, personal shoppers, and special-occasion chefs have thrived even when the economy did not, as have fun sports equipment such as inline skates and snowboards and accessories such as spangled flip-flops and other “girly things.”

The trick women face is to fit the good times in. Fully half of all women complain of time poverty, that they simply don’t have
enough time to do it all, according to RoperASW. Tension has become such a staple in their precarious juggling acts that many remind themselves that a day without stress is like a day without a heartbeat.

Marketers whose products can bust stress and elicit laughs have their foot in the door of women all too ready to lighten their loads and moods. Martha Stewart may have blown it by being greedy, but she led the crusade that turned chores into entertainment by making them fun.

**Respect**

When financial guru Suze Orman was small, her dad, a blue-collar laborer, brought her along when he went to Saks to buy a suit. Because he was shabbily dressed, no salesperson would wait on them. Disgusted, Orman’s father decided to shop elsewhere.

The humiliation that Orman felt then turned into a seething resentment that may have fueled her drive and ultimate success. Why? Because Orman, like virtually all women, yearns for respect.

When Aretha Franklin belted out “R-E-S-P-E-C-T” in 1967, she hit a chord to which American women have long responded. Numerous studies show that, for women, the way salespeople treat them is every bit as important as the quality of merchandise they are mulling and even its price.

Many marketers have gotten the message. Banking centers, photo drop-offs, and pharmacies in grocery stores tell women that their patronage is valued. So do mini-fast-food restaurants in discount stores and at gas stations and coat checks, carts and caddies to haul packages to the car, and rest areas for weary shoppers to recharge at malls. The relaxing, comfy atmospheres in Borders, Barnes & Noble, and Starbucks have made them community centers.

Still, while 87 percent of men feel that they are taken seriously when they bring their cars in for repairs, fewer than half of all women think so. They believe that while a man’s idiosyncrasies enhance his looks, a woman’s detract from hers. Women also find sales and customer service staffers dismissive, patronizing, and condescending.
They are especially wary of those selling electronics, whom they sus-pect stereotype them as easy marks and try to intimidate them into buying pricier models or consider them unworthy of their time if they aren’t knowledgeable enough to appreciate the gadgetry. Car service centers (admittedly an oxymoron) with smoky waiting areas, dirty plastic chairs, and a pile of dated *Field & Stream* magazines do not exactly lay out a cordial welcome mat.

**Greatness, Meaning, and Spirituality**

*If you think you’re too small to be effective, you’ve never been in bed with a mosquito.*

*BETTY REESE*

Women today want their lives to mean something, to satisfy an inner hunger, even if it costs. Eighty-six percent say that they are far less concerned with what others think of them than they once were. What concerns them now is editing their lives to make more room for the grace notes and inner satisfaction: Eighty-five percent of women yearn to make a positive difference in the world, and 72 percent say that no job is worth it if it doesn’t gratify them personally.

*There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror reflecting it.*

*EDITH WHARTON*

This quest for meaning has fostered an increased sense of spirituality (versus religiosity). Eighty-three percent of women call themselves spiritual, drawn by the lure of inner peace, less stress, connection with others, and acceptance of death. Savvy advertisers such as Rider Jeans with its “I Am Beautiful” campaign play back to women the theme that outer beauty comes from within.
This quest has spurred self-growth programs and “culture-tainment.” Women are taking courses, reading, and choosing educational vacations over restful ones. They are fueling the growth in educational TV, exotic foods and travel, and museum visits.

**Good Enough**

A dinner party is the litmus test. Some 81 percent of women hosts mingle with their guests and let the food be good enough. Only 18 percent slave in the kitchen to be sure that the food is spectacular.

With simplification being the goddess and her subjects editing their to-do lists, good enough regularly beats out spectacular. Almost every decision a woman makes is subject to split-second analysis: How much time, effort, and energy must I put into this? Does it add stress to my life or bring me more of the good stuff I need?

As they shift from working harder to working smarter, women seek out companies that are part of the solution, not part of the problem. More women are tossing out perfection to do just enough to get the payoff. More than half of those in the workplace say that they’ve got a job, not a career.

The only area where women are unwilling to sacrifice is motherhood. All others are open for negotiation. Take housekeeping. There aren’t many floors you can eat off anymore, and this suits women just fine. Surveys show that warm and cozy surpasses neat and clean as important home descriptors by more than three-to-one odds. Almost half of women concede that their cleaning standards have eroded over time and that their home is dirtier than the one where they grew up. But that’s because life beckons. A Kimberly-Clark survey found that 45 percent of women cut back because “there is more to life than cleaning.”

Good enough is, well, good enough in other areas too. Women want to do less work to look good. Overwhelmingly, the top criterion in selecting a hairstyle is that it is easy to maintain. Only 44 percent of women interviewed by DYG said that looking great all the time is important, compared with 68 percent who felt this way a decade ago.
Women Losing Zest for Cleaning House

Women’s zeal to keep their homes clean is fading faster than ring around the collar after a bout with Wisk. The image of Mom bending over the ironing board or mopping the kitchen floor now seems as outmoded as a Norman Rockwell Thanksgiving, a recent Black & Decker Corporation survey suggests. One in five women will do almost anything to avoid housecleaning. Most clean reluctantly and perfunctorily; few do it zealously—or religiously.

Terry Carlson, manager of cleaning products at Black & Decker’s household products unit, says that women’s relaxed attitude toward cleanliness reflects the changing role of the home from a castle that once symbolized upward mobility to a life center, a nucleus of experiences, and a symbol of personal values. In other words, it is safe for slobs to let their hair down.

Today, “wash ’n’ wear” and dry-clean-only have rendered the iron almost obsolete, and lightweight Swiffers have put the kibosh on mop wringers and hand-scouring floors. And women who once cleaned from room to room or performed one task at a time through the entire house today most often clean on the fly, with no particular pattern. This means that they want (in addition to a more participatory partner) anything that saves them time and energy.

When you think about it, the elements of CHARGE (control, harmony and love, amusement/fun, respect, greatness/meaning, and enough) are pretty good guidelines and assessment tools for men as well as women.