

For Men and Women Only!

For Women Only by Shaunti Feldhahn

For Men Only by Shaunti and Jeff Feldhahn

In my last series of blogs on marriage, I established the principle that the strength of a marriage is directly related to the ability of that marriage to carry increased responsibility. *It must follow that we make the nurturing and strengthening of our marriages a priority.* One way in which Deb and I try to do this is to regularly read marriage books together - over the years I have amassed quite a library on the subject!

Recently Deb and I read two new books, ***For Women Only*** by **Shaunti Feldhahn**, and ***For Men Only*** which she co-wrote with her husband **Jeff**, both of which we found extremely helpful. Even after nearly twenty years of marriage it is always possible to find new insights! The importance of good communication seems to be the key building block for a great marriage and communication will be enhanced if we have a clear understanding of our spouses and how they think.

Shaunti Feldhahn interviewed hundreds of men from all walks of life and conducted a professional survey to gain a better understanding of their inner lives. What her extensive research revealed was that deep down, many men had "similar fears and concerns, feelings and needs". *She came to realise that she didn't understand her husband as well as she'd thought she did!* Once she had written *For Women Only*, the companion volume followed. In both books the aim is to move to 'the all-important recognition of what (the surface understanding of your spouse) means in practice...'

Two Books – One Marriage!

In the following paper, Deb and I have summarised the main points of the two books, which I hope will encourage you to read and discuss them and grow in your marriage together. Deb will be looking at 'For Women Only' and I will be looking at 'For Men Only'.

For Women Only covers seven revelations or 'translations' from our surface level understanding of men to what that really means in practice. Shaunti stresses that she is not looking so much at '*outward behaviour as much as the inner thoughts and emotions that led to their behaviour.*' She is careful to make the point that she is making generalisations and that when she talks about how 'most' men think - she means 'most' and not 'all'!

For Men Only covers six major findings (I draw no conclusion from the fact that there is one less in this direction!) to help men understand their wives.

What these books give is an insight into the inner workings of the minds of men and women - by understanding one another better, by appreciating our basic differences - then we will find it easier to love and support each other more effectively. I would

recommend 'For Men Only' and 'For Women Only' as essential reading for every married couple in your church - including you!

What men and women really want...?

About men

"Our surface understanding is that 'men need respect'. What this means in practice is that they would rather feel unloved than inadequate and disrespected."

Your love is NOT enough. Your respect means more to your husband than even your affection. The author's research revealed that a man would rather feel alone and unloved than inadequate and disrespected. In fact, many men equated being unloved with being disrespected and were unable to distinguish between the two! Basically, what this means for us as wives, is that *in order to ensure our husband feels loved, we must ensure that he feels our respect most of all.*

"If a man's wife believes in him, he can conquer the world - or at least his little corner of it."

To show them love, Shaunti suggests, we need to show our respect for their judgements and abilities and in the way we communicate, particularly in public.

About women

"Our surface understanding is that 'women need to be loved.' What this means in practice is that even if your relationship is great, your mate likely has a fundamental insecurity about your love - and when that insecurity is triggered, she may respond in ways that confuse or dismay you until she feels reassured."

As Jeff Feldhahn explains 'Surely this doesn't apply to my wife! She knows I love her!' Yes she probably does, but we're not talking about what she knows logically, but rather about her feelings....

This underlying insecurity (Does he really love me?) requires us as husbands to constantly reassure our wives. *There is helpful direction on how to provide regular reassurance, on listening and showing physical affection* - a hug can go a long way to reassure your wife of your love for her. 'The power of pursuit' also figures here - your wife will feel loved if you continue to 'pursue' her, so we men need to continue to do romantic things, like bring flowers, send cards, write letters and provide meals out.

Affirmation and emotional testosterone!

About men

"Our surface understanding is that 'men are insecure'. What this means in practice is that despite their 'in control' exteriors, men often feel like imposters and are insecure that their inadequacies will be discovered."

Although many men may appear confident on the outside, they are hiding feelings of inadequacy. "The idea of someone thinking he can't cut it is humiliating - a feeling every man wants to avoid at all costs".

Shaunti's research revealed that 44% of men felt unappreciated at home. The author urges wives not to tear their husbands down - our words and actions speak volumes and many men who don't feel affirmed at home will look for affirmation elsewhere. One of the lures of pornography is that the women are giving out the message "I want you and you are the most desirable man in the world". We can encourage and affirm our husbands through supportive sex lives and ensuring that home is a place of retreat. One man said: "The role of sex cannot be underestimated. A great sex life will overshadow and overcome a multitude of imposter messages from the world."

About women

"Our surface understanding is that 'women are emotional'. What this means in practice is that women deal with multiple thoughts and emotions from their past and present all the time, at the same time - and these can't be easily dismissed."

I found this chapter helpful to explain the difference between the working of men's and women's minds. The illustration of the 'invasion of the pop-ups' was particularly helpful. These pop-ups also carry a far higher emotional weighting for women than emotions do for men. *The best parallel for helping men to understand the impact of emotions on women is that it is similar to the effect of testosterone through your body, for women it is emotional testosterone that drives them.*

Providing security – closeness not money

About men

"Our surface understanding is that 'men are providers'. What this means in practice is that even if you personally made enough money to support the family's lifestyle, it would make no difference to the mental burden he feels to provide."

Shaunti's research revealed that a man's need to provide weighs him down. It is not just a case of 'wanting' to provide, but rather a burden that presses heavily on him and which never goes away. *"Being a provider appears to be at the core of a man's identity as a male and as a person of worth."* It is also a way of saying 'I love you'. It is important that we understand this need - it is easy for us to inadvertently put pressure on our husbands when we express dissatisfaction with our financial situation.

"A man will internalize your disappointment as a personal failure to provide."

When going through financial difficulties, the best support we can offer is to help relieve the pressure they feel rather than adding to it.

About women

"Our surface understanding is that women want security - in other words, financial security. What this means in practice is that women need emotional security and closeness with you so much that she will endure financial insecurity to get it."

7 out of 10 married women would prefer to be financially insecure than endure a lack of closeness with their husbands. *If we men misread the perceived requirement of*

financial security and spend more hours at work, then we may be fulfilling our needs of identity through work rather than meeting our wife's need of emotional security. Some of us think we show our love for our wives by equating longer hours at work with more love shown for our wives. However what wives really want is our time and attention. The chapter finishes with a summary of the 5 things that mean 'security' to her:

1. *She feels that the two of you are close*
2. *She sees that you make time together a priority*
3. *She sees your commitment to her*
4. *She sees that you are active in the life of the home*
5. *She sees you making an effort to provide (as long as that doesn't crowd out 1-4)*

Feeling good – sex and listening!

About men

"Our surface understanding is that 'men want more sex'. What this means in practice is that your sexual desire for your husband profoundly affects his sense of well-being and confidence in all areas of his life."

Sex changes everything for men. It unlocks their emotions and we hold the key! Perhaps unsurprisingly, the survey revealed that men want more sex than they are getting and that women don't realise that this is a *crisis* for their relationship. Sex fulfils not just a physical need in men but a powerful *emotional* need. But that was not all; more than just needing sex, men *wanted* to feel *wanted*. The survey revealed that fulfilling sex makes a man feel loved and desired and gives him confidence. When we withhold sex, a man feels incredible rejection which can even send him into depression.

In response Shaunti calls on wives to **love** their husbands in the way they need. For some women who would love to be able to respond to their husbands but can't, this may mean getting help. It means making sex a priority and putting it above some of the things that we might, on preference, put higher up our list.

About women

"Our surface understanding is that when there is an issue, she doesn't want you to fix it; she wants you to listen. What it means in practice is that when she is sharing an emotional problem, her feelings and her desire to be heard are much more important than the problem itself."

The key lesson of this chapter is that we men need to learn the art of listening rather than trying to fix things and to focus on the emotions she is experiencing rather than the problem or solution. This is challenging for most men, because *our instinct is to try and fix the problem*.

The chapter provides some helpful suggestions on how to listen and reflect back the underlying emotions she is feeling, and shows us how, *if our wives are feeling listened to, understood and comforted then she will feel connected and supported*. My own reflection on this chapter is I that I probably need to read this once a week, to stay tuned into Deb's emotional needs.

Just looking and just tired?

About men

"Our surface understanding is that 'men are visual'. What this means in practice is that even happily married men struggle with being pulled toward live and recollected images of other women."

For the author, *this was the revelation that radically reshaped her understanding of men*. What's more, it's completely normal. For every man, sensual thoughts and images arrive involuntarily. But every man can make a choice to dwell on these images, or to dismiss them. The author provides some reassurances. Firstly, *man's temptation is often not primarily sexual* – it is simply admiring God's creation! Secondly, *every man is different* and we shouldn't jump to conclusions. Most importantly, it's not because of you and it doesn't affect his feelings for you!

Shaunti urges us to pray for our husbands and to offer them our support and understanding. Openness and honesty are crucial. Personally, I would add something to this. Of course we should dress modestly in public, but *there is nothing wrong with helping our husbands to create a mental visual catalogue of their wives in private!* In this way, the visual images he faces every day can be quickly dismissed for those of his wife.

About women

"Our surface understanding is that she doesn't want much sex and therefore she must not want me. What this means in practice is that physically, women tend to crave sex less often than men do, and it is usually not related to your desirability."

This important chapter helpfully addresses the subject of sex from a woman's perspective, providing a framework of understanding. The reason a woman tends to want to have less sex has nothing to do with the desirability of her husband. The three main reasons given were:

- *I have a lower sex drive – it's about hormones*
- *I'm sometimes just too tired at the end of a hard day*
- *the transition to wanting physical intimacy takes more effort*

The key lesson is - it not that she doesn't love her husband or even that men like to have more sex but that these 3 factors are significant in her level of desire.

The chapter finishes with 8 helpful tips on how to provide a context which allows her to be more responsive. *It is a final encouragement to take courage and talk to her about your sex life – this is good advice.*

Investing in romance!

About men

"Our surface understanding is that 'men are unromantic clods'. What this means in practice is that actually most men enjoy romance (sometimes in different ways) and want to be romantic – but hesitate because they doubt they can succeed."

Shaunti's survey revealed that in fact men 'very much desired romance for themselves'. *However, they frequently hesitate to do anything romantic because they fear that they may not do a very good job and are haunted by past failures*

Having fun together and doing "guy things" was high on the priority list for many men. Also, unsurprisingly, romance and sex are closely connected – it is an integral part of romance. It's important that we encourage our husbands in the efforts they make – this is especially important when a man is working outside his comfort zone! We are also urged to "make ourselves the kind of lover he wants to pursue." *Men are not mind readers and the occasional hint is helpful.* Finally, she suggests ensuring that our husbands know they are top of our 'to do' list.

About women

"Our surface understanding is that she wants to look attractive. What this means in practice is that inside your wife lives a girl who needs to know that you find her beautiful - and that you only have eyes for her."

In a world which increasingly values a certain kind of beauty and presents a picture through the media that is impossible to obtain, our wives have a deep need and desire to know that we find them beautiful and desirable. The challenge of this chapter is how often we express to our wives how beautiful we find them.

It also explains **why** many women spend lots of money on make up and fashion. I like the comment in the chapter which suggested we see this more as an investment in our wives rather than yet another new top! The chapter finishes with an encouragement for *husbands to keep their visual focus on their wives.*

Making an effort!

About men

"Our surface understanding is that 'men care about appearance'. What this means in practice is that you don't need to be a size 8, but your man does need to see you making the effort to take care of yourself – and he will take on significant cost or inconvenience in order to support you."

During the survey, the author found that: *"The effort you put into your appearance is extremely high on his priority list. Yet the chances that you know his true feelings are extremely low."*

Shaunti would go so far as to say that what she's learnt in this area has been life changing. *She is careful to try and present this information in a way that will hopefully challenge and not condemn.* Nonetheless, this was the topic most men reading the book wished their wives understood (sex and respect came close behind). Men were not asking their wives to look like supermodels – many stressed that they wished their partners were not so oversensitive about their body image. What mattered was the effort made – men equated this with showing love. *"When you take care of yourself, I feel loved".*

Conclusions – For Men and Women Only!

For Women Only – by Deb

I enjoyed this book, as I felt it brought a fresh look at many of the things we think we know about our husbands. It made me think more deeply about what my response should be to some of the 'revelations' and led to some interesting discussions with Steve. I was not surprised by many of the findings, such as a man's need for sex or respect, or the importance he places on appearance, but it did help me get inside my husband's mind a little more successfully! A couple of things did surprise me, such as the burden a man feels to provide. I really hadn't appreciated this before. I was also reminded that sex fulfils an emotional as well as a physical need in men, something I believe many of us forget.

Any book which brings insight and understanding to the person to whom we are married is to be welcomed. Like all books, there are some things which will resonate deeply with you and others which won't. It is a great book to discuss together – you may find it leads to some revealing and challenging discussions!

For Men Only – by Steve

I found this book extremely helpful in further understanding Deb. We have been married for nearly 20 years, have taught the marriage course 6 or 7 times and I have read widely on the subject of marriage, but this book gave me new insights into how my wife processes life. *I was always aware that emotions were more complicated for women, but the comparison of emotional testosterone for women with male testosterone helped me understand more deeply the need Deb has for emotional connection and shared emotional lives.*

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