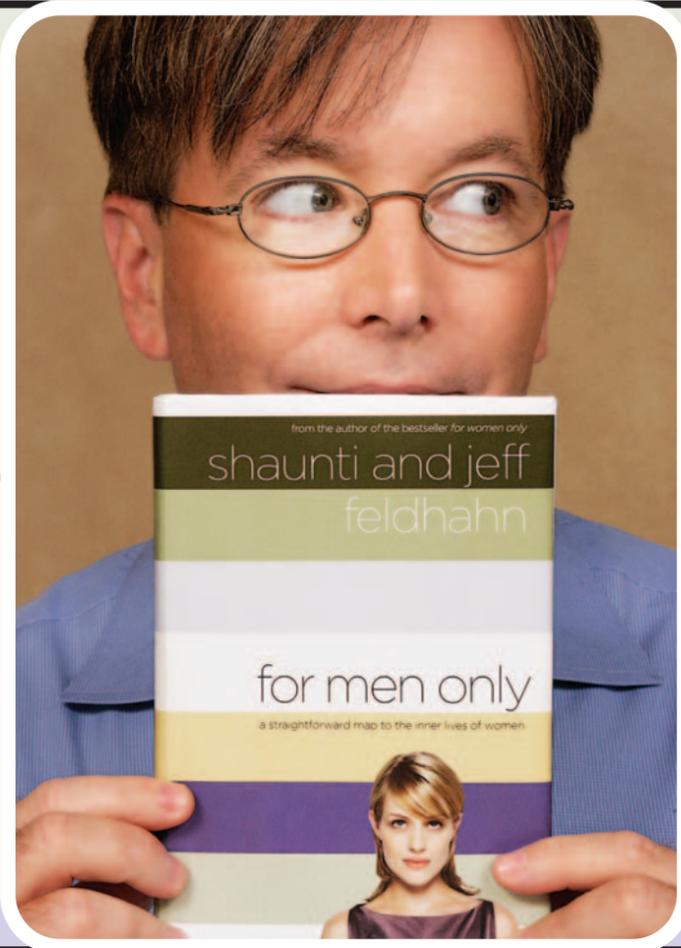
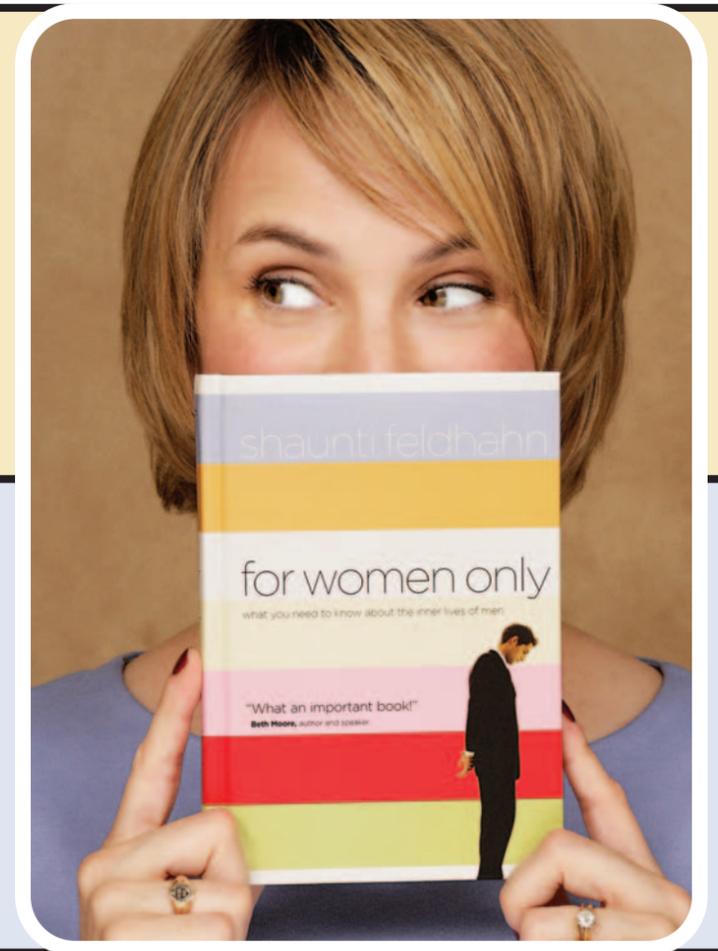


BY LISA A. RICE

Inside Conversation

Shaunti Feldhahn and her husband, Jeff, offer a peak at what men and women are really thinking (and how to understand each other).



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL GOMEZ

Ever struggle to know what your husband is thinking? Often wonder where your wife is coming from? If you're like most couples, you probably answered with a resounding "definitely!" Shaunti Feldhahn may have uncovered the link you need to bridge the gap between the complementary, but often confused, sexes.

In her book *For Women Only: What You Need to Know About the Inner Lives of Men*, Shaunti gives women a peak into the inner workings of the male mind and helps them understand how they can better relate to the men in their lives.

Since its release in 2004, the fast read has been flying off shelves in

both Christian and mainstream markets, speaking to women in every walk of life. Based on results from a national survey, the book reveals a lot about what men think and experience in day-to-day life. And Shaunti's not shy about sharing the reality of struggles guys face related to career, relationships, sex, and insecurity.

A Harvard graduate with a master's degree in public policy, Shaunti began working on Wall Street as a financial analyst and married Jeff, a Harvard Law School-educated attorney, the same year. She had no idea that her career track would change dramatically a few years later. But her experience in the secular Ivy

League world and the New York financial arena gave her a passion and an ability to reach those who did not share her faith.

For Women Only has opened many avenues for Shaunti. Recently, she was invited to speak to 5 million soap opera fans on the talk show "Soap Talk" to dish about her findings. Sitting on a stool next to hosts Lisa Rinna and Ty Treadway, Shaunti shared her fascinating insights about men. Rinna told viewers: "You have to buy this book!" Treadway went out of his way backstage to stop Shaunti and say, "I loved your book. ... You nailed it. You nailed me."

To give men an equal opportunity to get inside information about the

women they think they know, Shaunti and Jeff have teamed up to write *For Men Only: A Straightforward Map to the Inner Lives of Women*. Shaunti is also writing a follow-up to *For Women Only* called *What Was He Thinking?*

The Feldhahns now live in the Atlanta area with their two young children. And for the past seven years they have hosted a church small group for married couples in their home each week — a time when conversations between couples trying to better understand each other flow freely. Much like the candid conversations in their home, Shaunti and Jeff recently shared their thoughts with *HomeLife*.

HL: Is this what they're teaching at the Harvard Law and Kennedy Schools? How to write relationship books?

Shaunti: Not really, but I now look back and realize how every skill I learned in grad school and in my professional experience as a Wall Street analyst have prepared me for exactly what I'm doing now. For example, one thing that's made *For Women Only* so popular is that it's based on a scientific survey and a lot of analysis of how men think, not just anecdotal opinion. As an analyst, I understood the need to demonstrate the truth of findings that are sometimes difficult to hear and understand. I also am aware that, for better or for worse, the Harvard name opens doors and gives me some measure of credibility to write the string of books I've gotten to write thus far. It's a gift.

Jeff: (laughing) Not completely a gift. We're still paying off \$135,000 in school loans!

HL: What brought the two of you to Atlanta?

Jeff: I was working at a large law firm in Manhattan, and one day my law school roommate called and

invited me to consider his firm in Atlanta. We didn't have any family in New York, and I had always thought about moving.

Shaunti: To give the fuller picture, Jeff worked about 100 hours a week in Manhattan. I was frustrated with the late nights, the Saturday meetings, and the cancelled vacations. I was always asking, "Can't you just tell them no?" At the time, I didn't understand the dynamics of why he felt he had to work that way.

Jeff: I felt like I had no choice because of our student loan debt. Even though Shaunti worked as well, I felt it was *my* job to be sure that we could make it, and I couldn't risk losing my job.

Shaunti: I didn't understand the pressure I put on him. I really wanted to live in a secure building with a doorman, which of course was more expensive. Now I understand how frustrated Jeff must have been, thinking, *You want me to have a job that requires fewer hours of work and live in an expensive building?* He felt I was choosing a doorman building over his happiness. I didn't see that until years later, researching this book.

Jeff: Law is a very demanding, client-oriented business. When a client has a need, you have to respond. I knew I needed to get out when I saw how my partners lost their perspective about family. I realized I didn't want this for my life. I vowed to make the necessary changes.

HL: And did you?

Jeff: Yep. ... (laughing) Now I have lots of time, but I'm poor.

Shaunti: Now that Jeff is running his start-up technology company and I work from home, we have different kinds of struggles. When you're self-employed, you have seasons of plenty and seasons of ... not so much plenty. But our kids are growing up knowing what it's like to have Dad home and roughhousing by early evening. I'll take financial stresses any day over having plenty of money and having a hard time



“Guys know that women want security, but we think that means financial security.”

remembering what my husband looks like. Jeff is a terrific father, and now that I'm traveling a lot, he's been incredible at juggling the company and taking care of the kids. I know so many women who have a hard time trusting their husbands with the kids, wondering if he's going to know when they need a snack or a diaper ...

Jeff: (nodding) ... or a tourniquet.

Shaunti: Actually, Jeff may be a better dad than I am a mom, and that makes me feel a little insecure. My own mother was the “perfect” mom — always home with us, cooking dinner every night, but I find myself having a hard time being

quite as domestically skilled. Jeff is actually the neat one, so he ends up doing way more than his fair share of the housework and running the company and doing legal business on the side.

HL: Jeff, how are you feeling about the suc-

cess of your wife's bestseller — and her travel schedule?

Jeff: At times I'm totally fine, and at other times frustrated. But God helped me early on in this thing, and I have the grace to go with this season. I know that people sometimes have a hard time with their friends' success and less of a hard time with their friends' failure. I felt early on that if I couldn't be absolutely thrilled with the person that means the most to me in the world, how could I be happy with the success of others? ... A lot of people believe it's the man's role to work and the woman's to stay home, but I don't see that model in the Word. We work together from home, and we both raise the children. I still deal with all the guy stuff like, “Is my life mattering?” and “Am I able to take care of my family?” But I don't want the yuppie angst and naval-gazing to overshadow the fact that God has given me an amazing life.

HL: Shaunti, what made you start digging into all of this “guy stuff” in the first place?

Shaunti: My last novel [*The Lights on Tenth Street*] was about the unconditional love of Jesus. One of my main characters was a man, and

I didn't know how to write what a guy would be thinking in a given situation, so I set out to interview a bunch of guys. I asked my husband, other male friends, and even total strangers what they'd be thinking — and found myself really surprised by what they were saying. ... I realized what I was hearing was so important, it couldn't stop with just creating a character in a novel. I also knew that women wouldn't believe what I was finding, so I hired a professional survey company to do a national survey of men. And everything I had been hearing was born out by the survey. I hadn't just interviewed the hundred weirdest men on the planet!

HL: Are you included in *For Women Only*, Jeff?

Jeff: Yes. And I'll share a private translation tip with you: Throughout the book, if there is a positive or beneficial story about me, Shaunti names me by name. But unfortunately, not everything from my direction in this marriage has been positive. So those quotes may still wind up in the book, but they'll sound like this: “One 40-year-old man I know” Just insert “Jeff” in these places. This will be our little secret.

“I'll take financial stresses any day over ... having a hard time remembering what my husband looks like.”



HL: Just you and me and the *HomeLife* readers. So, Shaunti, what's a major difference you and Jeff have found in how you think?

Shaunti: The importance of respect is probably the most fundamental. My top need as a woman is to feel loved and cherished, but that's not usually a man's highest need. A man's highest need is to feel that his wife trusts and respects him. In our case, I would go out of my way to tell Jeff I loved him and to do these things that I hoped he would perceive as loving, but at the same time, I was doing things like questioning his decisions all the time — and teasing him in public.

Jeff: Oh yeah ... guys love that!

Shaunti: And that was making him feel like I just didn't respect him — which was his worst feeling.

HL: Have you seen any resistance to the message in your book?

Shaunti: A little. Most women and most men are really enthusiastic, but there's always going to be a percentage who have a hard time hearing some of the things. ... But in the book, I specifically say that I'm dealing with this on a very one-sided basis on purpose. This is not an equal treatment of men and women. Yes, there are things we women need our husbands to understand about us, but this book is not about those things.

HL: Jeff, you're co-writing *For Men Only* to help men understand women, right? What have you been finding?

Jeff: The problem is that guys know they don't understand women, but a guy will go, "Wow, why did that make her so mad? (Pause.) Huh, I wonder what's on the next channel."

HL: What surprised you the most about what you found?

Jeff: It had to do with how women feel about security. All guys know that women want security, but we think that means financial security. It was a huge surprise to learn that for women, emotional security is much more important — the knowledge that their husbands will always be there for them.

Shaunti: I think it will be encouraging for men to see that statistically women value them over big houses and nice cars. Honestly, so many marriage problems stem from just these sorts of misunderstandings — simply not knowing what the other person most needs.

HL: Do you discuss these issues in the newspaper column you write, Shaunti?

Shaunti: Yes. My column is a debate column that appears in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* but is syndicated elsewhere as well. I take

a conservative, Christian perspective on current events, and my debate partner takes a liberal, feminist position. Sometimes we can get into relationships and how women versus men think ...

Jeff: ... and if men are even needed.

Shaunti: The column is a fun opportunity to share biblically based truths.

HL: Is it hard to hold back your overtly Christian viewpoints?

Shaunti: From the beginning I distinctly felt the Lord was saying that if I couldn't share His truth and His love, I shouldn't do it. When we're talking about abortion or gay marriage, I can't say, "Because the Bible says so." I have to use analysis and arguments that people who never set

foot in a church could appreciate. And by doing that in a respectful, rather than a harsh way, hopefully it lowers their defenses and eventually opens them to the gospel.

Jeff: I heard a teaching on Zaccheus recently. The speaker said years of society's disapproval and condemnation didn't change Zaccheus at all. Yet in an instant, Christ's love, acceptance, and mercy transformed him. People need to see understanding and love from Christians.

HL: Are you seeing couples change as a result of reading the message in your book?

Shaunti: One thing that's been the most incredibly gratifying about this is the story of marriages saved. One man said he'd been going through a terrible crisis in his mar-

riage. His wife had taken their baby and moved across the country. When she returned a few weeks later to pick up the last of her things, she read *For Women Only* on the plane, and it rocked her world. She realized two things: First, the things she thought were terrible about her husband were common to every man; and second, she recognized there were things she had been doing to sabotage the relationship. She and her husband read the book to each other and talked all weekend. At the end of the weekend, she came home for good. ... It's an incredible privilege to be part of the restoration of a marriage. 🏡

Lisa A. Rice is a writer living in the Atlanta area with her husband, Eric, and their two children.



For Parents Only

Jeff and Shaunti Feldhahn offer these tips for parenting boys and girls.

For Daughters: Young women need emotional security as much as (or more than) adult women do. It is critical for a girl to feel secure in the love of her parents. As with any woman, girls can even handle financial struggles as long as the emotional security is there.

For Sons: The need for respect is just as powerful in a growing boy as it is in our husbands. We need to be building our sons up to feel like men, to feel we trust and respect them. The power of giving them that is huge.

7 Revelations About Men (from *For Women Only*)

Surface Understanding:

What It Really Means in Practice:

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|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. Men need respect. | Men would rather feel alone and unloved than inadequate and disrespected. |
| 2. Men are insecure. | Despite their "in control" exteriors, men often feel like impostors and are insecure that their inadequacies will be discovered. |
| 3. Men are providers. | Even if you personally made enough income to support the family's lifestyle, it would make no difference to the mental burden he feels to provide. |
| 4. Men want more sex. | Your sexual desire for your husband profoundly affects his sense of well-being and confidence in all areas of life. |
| 5. Men are visual. | Even happily married men struggle with being pulled toward live and recollected images of other women. |
| 6. Men are unromantic clods. | Actually, most men enjoy romance (sometimes in different ways) and want to be romantic — but hesitate because they doubt they can succeed. |
| 7. Men care about appearance. | You don't need to be a size 3, but your man does need to see you making the effort to take care of yourself — and he will take on significant costs or inconvenience in order to support you. |