

What's Going on Inside Her Head?

AN INTERVIEW WITH
SMART GUY & GIRL JEFF
& SHAUNTI FELDHAWN

SMART GUY



Jeff Feldhahn was skeptical. He didn't believe that the female mind could be understood. He's not alone. A lot of guys have scratched their heads and wondered why the women in their lives do the things they do. Jeff's wife, Shaunti, assured him that it wasn't a mission impossible. Once Jeff started talking with some focus groups, he found out she was right! (Don't you hate it when that happens.) We sat down with this husband and wife writing duo to unravel the mysteries of the female mind—well, at least some of them.

What were some of the things that you didn't understand about women when you started on this quest?

Jeff: I think most guys understand their wives at some level. I was confused at times, but I just figured it would take too much energy to really try to figure it out. The biggest shock to me was that I really did believe Shaunti thought just like me. [I didn't think] she had a different way of looking at things and that my way of thinking doesn't even cross her mind.

So have you completely dispelled the feminine mystique?

Jeff: I'm not bold enough to think we've got them all figured out. I think there's still some feminine mystique left. What we've tried to do is pick up on the topics and items that I think will really impact your relationship.

In the all-female focus groups, what was something you learned that prompted you to change how you interacted with Shaunti?

Jeff: I remember in high school having a girlfriend who dumped me after graduation. I felt like I couldn't get it out of my head. It hurt a whole lot, and I didn't

like the feeling. That's how women in the focus group described how they felt when things are out of sorts in their relationships with their husbands. They said, "But it's even more intense because we're married to you. It's not just a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship. It hurts much more." When you are out of sorts with your spouse or your girlfriend, we guys have a tendency to just move on. I don't sit there and think, "Does she love me?" But women do.

That was one thing that made me realize that what I think Shaunti will simply get over isn't so easy for her, so I need to be much more proactive and recognize there's pain she's experiencing. I can do something about it. Even if I'm a little steamed, I can say, "You know what? We still haven't resolved this particular issue, and I need some time to process it. I need time by myself, but I want you to know we're OK."

Any more surprises?

Jeff: The other thing that was shocking in the focus group was when we were talking about beauty. I have a six-year-old daughter. A day or two doesn't pass that I don't say to her, "You're so beauti-



ful. I love you." I want to build her up in that way so that she feels affirmed. The things I think my daughter needs to build her up and affirm her, Shaunti needs too. I just hadn't thought of it. I think she's beautiful. I love her. I married her. But I forget to tell her. That's something I'm having to retrain myself to do, and I'm still not very good at it.

One of the things that was so enlightening in *For Men Only* was how a woman's mind is like multiple open windows. Talk about that a little more.

Shaunti: Guys are like a computer desktop where you only have one window open at once and you work on one thing. You click the x, close it, and you move on to the next thing. Women can have seven, eight, 10, 20

windows open all at once, and we're bouncing back and forth. Frankly, if there's one that keeps popping to the forefront, even if we don't want it there, we can't just close out that thought. If something concerns us, it is so difficult to get rid of it. It keeps popping back up.

Jeff: I remember several months ago, we were on a trip up to see Shaunti's parents. We had stopped overnight at a hotel while on the road, and Shaunti got an e-mail that was somewhat disconcerting. Normally, I would just say, "Don't think about it. Let's just go." But I remember saying, "You need to call that person."

Shaunti: Instead of telling me to futilely click the x shut when it wouldn't shut—

and it would have kept bothering me for the next eight hours of driving—Jeff’s words gave me the release to call and resolve it.

What if she seems to be hung on something and things are too crazy in your own life to help her close that window? Can a guy say something like, “I’m really busy at work right now, I’m really worn out. But I will get to it on this date”?

Shaunti: Yes, that will allow her to close the window. For example, in my closet I had a shelf that I had put a few too many clothes on, and it had pulled away from the wall. Jeff was busy at work. I kept saying this is driving me crazy. All he had to do was say I’m real busy this date and this date, but I promise I will get to it by next Monday. That’s all it took for me to relax about it.

Jeff: And that’s what I did after 18 months.

Shaunti: But that’s another good thing that anytime a guy feels like she won’t let go of something or that she’s nagging him, it’s a really good sign that there’s a serious open window there.

What happens when we pinpoint what that “window” is? I’ve heard that we’re not supposed to try to fix it. Is that right?

Shaunti: This whole thing that guys don’t get about “she doesn’t want you to fix it, she just wants you to listen” is that it’s really girlcode for, “I want you to listen first to my feelings”—all those things you’ve trained yourself your whole life to see as counterproductive clutter—that’s what I want you most to listen to first. Once a woman feels listened to and knows that the guy in her life understands her feelings, then we can deal with whatever the problem is. The vast majority of the women on the survey actually agreed that their man’s solution for her situation was

a good one. But it was totally counterproductive if he didn’t first say, “That must have made you feel so disappointed,” or “I’m so sorry that you’re having that argument with your best friend,” and then dealt with the issue. It’s not that complicated, it just doesn’t feel natural. But here’s what it comes down to—every man wants peace in his home. Every man wants to make his wife happy. Women sometimes don’t believe it, but I’ve seen that most guys have total goodwill toward their wives. They’ve been confused the whole life of their relationship by feeling like, “I can’t figure her out. I can’t make her happy. I can’t win.” Here’s the truth—you can absolutely win. She is created so differently from you that it takes relearning a few simple things.

Women want security—but what do they want us to provide?

Jeff: The security that they’re really looking for is emotional security as opposed to financial security. Financial stuff is good but it doesn’t rise to the level of importance of emotional security. Emotional security is closeness. It’s the knowledge and the trust that the two of you have that you’re always going to be together.

It sounds like this is a constant learning process.

Jeff: What I think this little exercise has done for me is to make me question my assumptions. I had assumed that Shaunti was experiencing x, y, and z and therefore her reaction was this. What was actually happening was she was experiencing a, b, and c, and therefore her reaction was this. I just had a long set of assumptions.

And to not trust your first reaction when you’re interacting with her.

Jeff: Absolutely. **SF**