

The Inner Lives of Wives

by Jeff Feldhahn

Guys, I have good news: It's easier than you probably realize to understand your wife and make her happy.

I'm just an average, sometimes oblivious guy, but when I found myself caught up in some research about women's inner lives—research that my wife and I did for a book—I realized how wrong I'd been to assume women were impossible to understand. Let me share a couple of my eye-opening discoveries.

An open-ended deal

You said, "I do." You thought the deal was closed. In all likelihood, the question "Does she love me?" has never again crossed your mind.

But according to our nationwide survey of 400 women, your wife probably sees the transaction differently. For her, the deal is never closed. Her "I do" will probably always mean "Do you?"

Buried inside even the most secure woman is a latent insecurity about whether her man really loves her. Yes, she knows her husband loves her, but sometimes her feelings need to be convinced. When this vulnerability is triggered—by marital conflict, for example, or even your silence—most women show signs of distress until the concern is resolved. You can read "show signs of distress" as "drive their man nuts." Peace at home comes when men understand this insecurity.

Most guys coast along unconcerned about their relationship's health. But to eight out of 10 women, this is unthinkable. When something's not quite right with their marriages, it's difficult or impossible for them to get it off their mind. As several women put it, "When we're at odds, nothing is right with the world until the issue is resolved."

A woman is likely to experience insecurity about her marriage even if her husband isn't the

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The Inner Lives of Husbands

by Shaunti Feldhahn

"I've been married 30 years, and I can't believe I never knew this before!"

I've lost count of how many times a woman has said something like this after I've given a talk. When I interviewed more than 1,500 men for a book on the inner lives of husbands, I realized just how many misconceptions women have about men—and how often those perceptions affect our relationships. Do you want to see your man with new eyes? Consider just a few of these findings.

Love is not enough

"Love is all you need," the popular song says. We women often agree—but men don't. In fact, in a nationwide survey, three out of four men said they would exchange feeling that their wives loved them if they could instead feel that their wives respected and trusted them.

As foreign as this may seem to us, respect feels like love to men. Loving your man the way he needs requires that he feel your trust and admiration. Most of us do respect our men, but we may not realize that sometimes our words or actions convey exactly the opposite.

We wonder why he gets mad at simple things, such as teasing him about his hopelessness as an amateur plumber or suggesting that he ask for directions. He's mad because what he just heard was *You're stupid!* And if he thinks this is what you are saying throughout the day—even if you never meant to—it drastically affects how he feels about himself and about you.

God has given us many signposts for preventing these problems, and many of us have totally missed them. Ephesians 5, for

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cause. Still, her man can be part of the solution. Here are two key techniques—both completely doable for ordinary guys.

“If sex is free and it’s fun, why doesn’t she want lots of free fun?”

First, reassure her. During conflict, remind her that you love her and your relationship is OK. When you need space, make sure she knows it’s not about her. Understand that sometimes she may seem clingy or critical because of her insecurity; keep reassuring her of your love. Yes, hug the porcupine—and you might just see all those quills disappear.

Second, keep pursuing her. You can prevent a lot of insecurity by romancing your wife. And it’s not the big exhausting efforts that speak to her so much as the little day-to-day expressions. Flirting. Listening. Simple notes. Compliments.

Sex isn’t the same to her

Guys expect wives to have female bodies wrapped around a male mind. Subconsciously, we think men and women have basically the same sexual wiring. Mismatches leave us baffled. As one of my buddies put it, “If sex is free and it’s fun, why doesn’t she want lots of free fun?”

When we hear “Not tonight, I’m tired,” we take it personally. We assume it means we’re not desirable. Surprise, guys! Ninety-six percent of women we surveyed said their man’s desirability had nothing to do with their “no.” Most women find their husbands desirable and want a great sexual relationship. One survey taker summed it up: “Even though I don’t want sex as often, I still love him deeply and find him very attractive.”

Your ego doesn’t need to take a hit. Instead, realize that your wife is not wired the way you are. She needs a lot more anticipation time to get her mind and emotions ready for sex. Flirting over breakfast helps her look forward to an evening of sexual intimacy.

She’s also stimulated differently. You’re set

off by what you see. But she needs to feel connected emotionally. She can’t help remembering how you treated her throughout the day. Hurt feelings or neglect have to be healed and forgiven; positive memories make her ready.

Those positive memories are surprisingly easy to create by gently touching her, by listening and empathizing, by helping around the house. During our research, one woman said she tells her husband, “Honey, there’s nothing more sexy than watching you clean something!” She just wanted to feel cared for.

If there’s a lot you have misunderstood about your wife, you’re not alone. Like me and other formerly oblivious guys, you really can learn how to make your wife happy. ■

Jeff Feldbahn and his wife, Shaunti, are co-authors of For Men Only: A Straightforward Guide to the Inner Lives of Women. (Item code P00461B. Suggested donation \$15.)



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example, repeatedly urges husbands to love their wives and wives to respect their husbands. We women excel at expressing love, but that’s not what a man needs most.

Of course, you may not always feel like respecting him. But just as you want him to choose to love you even when you’re not lovable, your man needs you to choose to demonstrate respect unconditionally.

That choice does tremendous things inside him. Throughout my survey, men often told me they couldn’t become the strong, trustworthy, loving men they wanted to be without unconditional support and affirmation from their wives.

How do we do this? As a start, we can try to become more aware of our unintentional disrespect and choose respectful attitudes, words and actions instead. For example, he needs you to respect his judgment; questioning him makes him feel inept. And at all costs, avoid belittling words. Tell him, “I’m proud of you!”

Sex changes everything

Second only to your husband’s need for respect is his need for you to desire him sexually. It’s not exactly shocking to say men want sex more than women do. But wives often misunderstand what sex means to men. We tend to think of sex as a physical need for men. But as I researched, I found that sex also meets an incredibly powerful emotional need—his need to know that you desire him.

In a profound way, feeling wanted sexually gives a man confidence and a sense of well-being in every other area of his life. The opposite—no sex or mechanical sex because you “have to”—is as emotionally wounding to him as his sudden silence would be to you.

And believe it or not, getting enough sex isn’t the point. Nearly all the men surveyed—97 percent—said that even if their wives agreed to have sex every time husbands wanted, sex would still be empty if their wives didn’t seem to desire them.

When we say no to sex, we’re usually saying we don’t want sex at that moment. But he hears the much more painful message that we don’t want him. One man said, “When she says no, I feel rejected. ‘No’ is not no to sex; it’s no to me as I am.” By contrast, making the first move once in a while sends a powerful and affirming message to your man.

To connect with our husbands, we have to accept and work with the remarkable, God-crafted differences between us. And if we do so, we have a tremendous opportunity to give our men confidence to become the men God has called them to be. ■

Shaunti Feldbahn is the author of For Women Only: What You Need to Know About the Inner Lives of Men. (Item code P00235B. Suggested donation \$15.)

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