



The Misunderstanding Factor:

As counselors, I know you often see reconciliation scenes firsthand. And you also see the reverse—individuals who shake further and further apart... even feeling as though their spouse doesn't care about them at all. Yet the whole time they have no idea that, in fact, the other person was probably trying **so hard** to be a good spouse but simply didn't know that they were trying hard in the wrong areas.

One Saturday morning after speaking on the subject of my book, *For Women Only: What You Need to Know About the Inner Lives of Men*, I witnessed the results of a conversation that has been privately repeated many times. I was at a women's retreat, explaining what men really need that they often cannot articulate. The previous night I had shared several of the findings that most surprised me, including the fact that men need respect so much that most of them would be willing to give up love to get it. I explained that we women are so good at showing love, but often unintentionally do things that our men perceive as painful disrespect.

Many women went home that night very thoughtful, and before the first session on Saturday, I was approached by a petite, African-American woman and her football-player-sized husband. She had tears on her cheeks as she said, "I had no idea. I had no idea that I was hurting my husband so much. We'd been talking about separating, but God opened my eyes to all the things *I* was doing so wrong. I went home last night and asked him to forgive me."

I looked up at her husband and was startled to see this big, hulking man begin to cry. Trying to contain his emotions, he said, "I had to come down here myself and say thank you. I haven't been able to put how I was feeling into words. You did it for me, and she finally understood." As he hugged me, I found myself crying with them from the gratitude of watching God open blind eyes—and save a marriage.

SHAUNTI FELDHAWN



Helping Men and Women Understand the **Truth** About Each Other

As counselors, I know you often see reconciliation scenes firsthand. And you also see the reverse—individuals who shake further and further apart, eventually becoming convinced the other is mostly to blame, even feeling as though their spouse doesn't care about them at all. Yet the whole time they have no idea that, in fact, the other person was probably trying *so hard* to be a good spouse but simply didn't know that they were trying hard in the wrong areas.

Tragic Misunderstandings

In the short five years that I've been researching relationships and writing *For Women Only* and *For Men Only*, I have seen just how many marriages are failing from something as tragically stupid as a lack of information.

A wife, for example, works so hard to say, "I love you," and serve her husband, but she has no idea that it's far more important to him that she stop making him feel foolish by overriding all his

decisions. Or a husband is working long hours away from his wife and family at a job he dislikes, but is gutting it out to provide the "security" his wife needs—never realizing that her security has little to do with finances and everything to do with his emotional presence.

Some of the saddest e-mails I get are from people who read my findings and say, "I got a divorce five years ago, and now I know why." And even people in healthy relationships often get confused by the opposite sex! I hope that in some small way these findings might bring some critical "aha" moments to the people you counsel and care about.

Now, of course the application of this information will be different from the norm when people and relationships are extremely broken. Those situations go beyond the scope of my expertise and into yours. But even in those cases, I still believe it's helpful for women and men to understand the truth—not the wishful thinking—about how the other is wired.

These findings are not just my opinion... they are culled from four years of primary research with more than 1,500 men and 3,000 women, including hundreds of person-on-the-street interviews in coffee shops, airplanes and offices, and three scientific, nationally-representative surveys of men and women across the country.

I can't go into great detail here, but let me introduce you to a few of these key truths.

What Women Misunderstand About Men

Overall, women tend not to realize just how much power they have in their relationships with their men, to either build them up or to tear them down. A few key areas:

Men need respect so much they would give up love to get it.

Most women understand that men need respect, but have no idea that it is both

a man's top need in the relationship *and* that it is all too easy for a man to feel that his wife does not respect him. In my survey, 74% of men indicated that they needed respect so much that if they had to make a choice, they would give up feeling loved to get it.

Many of us think that love is supposed to be unconditional, but respect has to be earned. But within marriage, that is a totally unbiblical idea. Instead, in Ephesians 5, God clearly tells husbands to love their wives and wives to "see to it" that they respect their husbands; making it a choice rather than a feeling. The fact is, men are both empowered and melted by a woman's choice to demonstrate respect even if they haven't earned it that day—just as a grouchy woman is softened by seeing her husband choose to show love even if she wasn't particularly lovable that day.

Many women do generally respect and trust their husbands and have no idea that they regularly make them feel like they don't! For example, habits as "minor" as teasing him in front of friends, asking him to stop and ask for directions, or telling him how to take care of the kids. As one man put it, "She probably doesn't mean to, but when she does those 'little' things, they aren't little to me. She's saying that she thinks I'm stupid. It's humiliating. And it gets to you after a while."

Emerson Eggerichs, author of the very helpful book, *Love and Respect*, explains a signal that women can use to catch disrespect when they don't realize they are doing it: "Crying is often a woman's response to feeling unloved; anger is often a man's response to feeling disrespected." When a woman sees her husband get angry, she can realize that he's probably been stung by disrespect that she didn't intend.

Ladies, when you see that anger, think back, figure out what it was, and mark it so you hopefully do not do it again. Obviously, the Bible says, "In your anger, do not sin..." but it is extremely

helpful for women to know that reasonably handled anger is actually a man's very legitimate response to emotional pain.

His wife's sexual desire for him impacts his confidence and sense of well-being in every other area of his life.

Most women misunderstand what sex means to their husbands. A wife thinks of physical intimacy as being primarily a physical need for him—and at the end of a long day, sleep seems like a pretty important physical need, too! But 97% of men said sex actually meets a powerful *emotional* need to feel desired by their wives.

If a man feels like his wife wants him, it gives him a sense of confidence and well-being in *every other area of his life*. And if he doesn't feel desired, and feels like it's too easy for her to say, "I'm tired," it gives him a dragging sense of depression and a lack of well-being.

Many women don't understand that their husbands feel incredibly vulnerable when they "make a move" on their wives and get little or no response—this affects them deeply. When women say, "I'm tired," they simply don't feel like making love at that point in time. But a man hears a much more painful message that his wife doesn't want *him* as a man. One man on the survey said, "When she says no, I feel REJECTED. 'No' is not no to sex... it's no to me as I am."

By contrast, men said if they felt desired by their wives—with something as simple as her making the first move once in a while—they could conquer whatever other challenges life throws at them.

What Men Misunderstand About Women

Overall, men tend to think of women as "random" and don't realize that it is much simpler than they ever realized to understand their wives and make them happy. A few key areas:

A woman's lack of desire for sex that night is usually not about him.

If a wife says, "I'm tired," men automatically think they aren't desirable: *If I was enough of a stud*, they think, *she wouldn't be tired*. But in our survey, we found that desirability had almost nothing to do with it. Of the women who said they tended to want less sex, only 4% said it was because he wasn't attractive or desirable! Instead, by far the top reasons were physiological and needing to feel close outside the bedroom in order to want to be close inside the bedroom.

On the physiological side, most men (and women) have no idea that there are actually two different kinds of desire. *Assertive desire* tends to be tied to testosterone and *receptive desire* to estrogen. Someone with assertive desire has the desire to pursue sex, to initiate it, to think about it all the time and be ready at a moment's notice. Someone with receptive desire is just as willing, enjoys it just as much when it's happening, but *doesn't* have as much desire to pursue or initiate it, doesn't think about it all the time, and *isn't* ready at a moment's notice!

A wife who typically has receptive desire just has to be approached differently and given some "anticipation time." She needs to know what he's got on the menu for the evening before they get to the bedroom!

This doesn't mean (as some depressed guys might think) that she finds him so undesirable that she needs some sort of "warning." Very much the opposite. Instead, her brain needs time to warm up all that estrogen in her system so her body is truly anticipating it. All it takes is a cute little comment from him like, "Glad you thought it was sweet of me to pick up the dry cleaning. Maybe you can show me *how* sweet a little later!"

I know that many of you probably already help men understand and apply the other truth that women first need to feel close outside the bedroom. But a man can be very close with his wife... and she *still* may not be thinking about

sex without some "anticipation time" from him!

A woman needs emotional security so much she would give up financial security to get it.

Most men know that their wives need "security," but it turns out that they have a fundamental misunderstanding about what that means. A man usually thinks solely in financial terms: "She has to know that the mortgage can be paid and that we're building a retirement fund."

Yet for most women, while financial security is important, it isn't nearly as vital as emotional security—knowing that her husband is always going to be there for her, and that they will always be close. That is so much more important than any *thing* he could provide. In fact, on the survey, 70% of married women said that if they had to make a choice, they would actually choose to endure financial struggles if that is what it took to get more closeness and avoid insecurity in the relationship.

Because God has wired men with such a need to be the provider, men find this truth very hard to believe. But it's liberating once a man realizes that, statistically, his wife truly may care more about his having time with the family than about having a big house and car. Many men told me that they often felt trapped in a job that they disliked, but stuck with it because they knew their wives needed security. (Which, by the way, made it even harder for them to understand why their wives complained about the long hours... but that is a subject for another day.)

It is encouraging for men to know that their wives actually mean it when they say they would be willing to downsize their lifestyles in order for their husbands to take a more family friendly, lower paying job that *he* would actually enjoy.

Having this sort of new information won't in itself fix a broken relationship, but God can sure use it to open eyes

that have been well-intentioned, but blind. I hope it is of some use to you as you continue in your critical service of counseling others—with my deepest thanks—on the front lines of the battle for marriages. ☞

Shaunti Feldhahn is a best-selling author, speaker and nationally-syndicated newspaper columnist. She holds a Master in Public Policy degree from



Harvard and has worked on Wall Street and Capitol Hill. In her books, For Women Only, For Men Only, For Young Women Only, and the newest, For Parents Only: Getting Inside the Head of

Your Kid, she applies her analytical experience to helping readers understand the key surprises about those who are most important to them.

**He overcame adversity.
Now he helps others
do the same.**



Christopher Murphy, M.A.
Student, Doctoral Program in Clinical Psychology

"MY JOURNEY TO REGENT WASN'T SO MUCH A CHOICE—I MADE AS A CHOICE MADE BY GOD. GOD LED ME OUT OF MY COMFORT ZONE AND PLACED ME AT REGENT TO STRETCH ME AND TEACH ME TRUST."

CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, M.A.

When he was just a boy, Christopher Murphy experienced the fear and uncertainty of a life-threatening illness. Christopher believes God used his past to help season and prepare him for his future as a counselor. He chose Regent University for the school's scientific and spiritual integrity and believes the combination has given him an insight that is helping him make a difference in his job counseling troubled youth. Are you ready to take your life and your career to a higher place? Contact us to find out more about our fully accredited graduate degree programs in psychology and counseling.

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