



*What Your Husband
or Wife Wish You Knew
But Will Never Tell You*

SHAUNTI FELDHAHN
WITH MARK TIMM

thrive
A Zislar family Community



interview transcript

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Mark Timm:

Hey, everybody in the Thrive community. Welcome. I am just so excited to introduce to you our expert for July. After receiving her graduate degree from Harvard, where she met her husband Jeff, Shaunti Feldhahn started out on Wall Street and now uses her analytical skills in a very different way: social research to help relationships thrive. I know all of you are here because you want your family to thrive and this is going to be so helpful.

She's the best-selling author of more than a dozen research-based books for improving relationships of all kinds, marriage, parenting, workplace, and even people who drive us nuts. Shaunti loves to blow up conventional wisdom and provide those AHA moments that leave her audiences saying, "Wow. I guess I have some work to do."

With more than two million copies of her books in 24 languages, Shaunti is making a difference in personal lives, corporations, the church, groups around the world. She is one busy person. A wife, a mother, author, speaker at nearly 50 events each year, we are so honored that she's taken time from her schedule to join the Thrive community as our July Thrive Family Focus expert.

Welcome, Shaunti.

Shaunti F:

It's good to be with you.

Mark Timm:

Well, it's great to have you. I'm just going to dive right in, because there is so much we could cover. In fact, we probably should have recorded the pre-time together, because there's a whole other show in what we just chatted about for 20 minutes. But that just means we get to invite you back another time.



So, let's dive right in. You're well known for helping women understand men. Your book, *For Women Only*, has sold more than one million copies in 24 languages. How can you, as a woman, tell us what we don't know about men? How did you get started in this area of expertise?

Shaunti F:

Every guy who interviews me always asks that question.

Mark Timm:

That's the first question.

Shaunti F:

Yeah.

Mark Timm:

I'm all ears by the way, because I'm very curious to know what you're going to share with the women about men.

Shaunti F:

Yes.

Mark Timm:

I know there are men listening that are going to get just as much out of this part of our interview, as well.

Shaunti F:

Yeah. Well, okay. Here's what happened. I'm not a psychologist, as you said in my introduction. I'm not a counselor, right. I'm not a therapist. I just started out as the average semi-confused wife, right? But, I also have an analytical background, worked on Wall Street, and that was sort of my world. Numbers person, number crunching, all that kind of stuff. It was interesting, after my husband and I moved down from New York to Atlanta, which is where we live today, I had a chance ... It's sort of a long story. I had a chance to write a couple of novels. One of the main characters in this novel I was writing was a guy, and I realized I had no idea how to put thoughts in his head. It's a novel. I had to say what this character was thinking. I couldn't just say what he was doing. What do I know about what a guy would be thinking? And then some pretty personal situations.



This whole thing started because I would go to Jeff, my husband, or go to other guys. We'd be out to dinner with another couple, and I'd say, "Um, can I interview you?" Here's this scene in this novel I'm writing, what would you be thinking if this was you? As they started telling me what they'd really be thinking, half the time, I'm like, "Seriously?" I was really shocked, honestly, by some of the things I was hearing. As I started doing more of these conversations, I realized, it's not just that what I'm hearing is surprising, it's really, really important, really foundational.

These thoughts, these feelings, these weren't things that the men said that they kind of thought, once every few months, it happened every now and then. Stuff they were describing was stuff that they said they thought, they felt, it was in their everyday multiple times a day. At that point, I think Jeff and I had been married about eight years, and I'm thinking, of course, "Why have I not heard this before?" That's when I think that analyst hat went on, and sort of that background, like, okay, this is really important.

It's a totally miraculous story of how I ended up doing this huge national study, a national survey of men, very nationally representative, and put it in the book, *For Women Only*, and it just became this huge bestseller. That started the process of really giving me the resources to be able to do the next study, and the next one, and then the next one. Now, we're 12 years down the road, 13 years down the road, and I've done a bunch of these, including several other studies that included men and dealt with that. That's why I can come and say, "Ladies, here's what we don't get about men. Here's the numbers to prove it."

Mark Timm:

I love that because a lot of times, when we just happen on it because we have a need, then we figure out other people have a need, we realize, wait a minute. We're not alone on this little island. If I have this need, there are other people out there that have it as well. I love that it happened very organically, because that means that you're satisfying the needs of a lot of people out there by bringing this to the table.

I'm going to take that next step because, as a guy, I'm ready to hear a few of the tactical and nuts and bolts here. We all know, intuitively, that men and women are different, but many people think that those differences come more from how we're raised and from social expectations, but from what I read, you disagree.

Shaunti F:

Well, it's not that I disagree a 100%, because everybody knows that there's nature and nurture. All of that plays into everything, but the old idea that I think a lot of us might have had in years past, that this is just



socialization. It's not. It's not just socialization. There literally are brain wiring differences between men and women. And yes, to some degree, even your experiences can change, your brain is plastic, there's a lot of things that can change, but not the basic structure.

You look at what the neuroscientists have discovered over, really even some of it, has been the last five or ten years, you see huge differences between men and women, that literally come out of in utero changes in brain wiring, before the baby is even born. It used to be, honestly, when I first did the first edition of *For Women Only*, I literally would say, "Wow. This is what I'm finding. Can't tell you why. I have no idea, it's just 82% of men said this or 74% of men said that." Now, with some of the advances in brain science, I can say, "Okay, there's why."

Mark Timm:

Don't you think that kind of understanding that gives us permission to be different?

Shaunti F:

Oh yeah.

Mark Timm:

It's takes some pressure off. We had Dr. Chapman, which I think you know, did one of our expert interviews, he talked about the love languages, and he kind of gave us permission to love differently, took the pressure off. What I hear you saying is, that we're hardwired differently, so we should take a step back and say, "It's okay to be different." We're supposed to be different.

Shaunti F:

Well, and there's a really important, so therefore, because of that, this is where, sorry to the women listening, I'm going to nail us for a minute because I realized that I had a secret assumption in the back of my head, somewhere, and maybe some of the other women listening will agree with this, where we kind of think, as women, that we're the ones who are good at relationships. We kind of think, that we're the ones with interpersonal skills, and you know what that means obviously. It means if there's a problem, it's his fault. We kind of subconsciously think, "He just has to learn to relate better." Kind of pat, pat, pat, kind of condescending, without realizing that's what we're thinking, because we think we're the ones who are doing it right.

Suddenly, when you realize that there are these very important, very dynamic, foundational differences,



you suddenly realize, oh my gosh, the way that men are wired to relate, is totally legitimate. It's just totally different. In a lot of these things, there is no right and wrong. It really is different. Now, obviously, all of us have right and wrong ways that we can interact, but the foundational sort of predispositions, the different ways that men instinctively handle some thing, the things that instinctively hurt a man's feelings, we as women, we have to get off of our subconscious high horse and go, "Wow. I had no idea. I had no idea that I was doing things every day that might actually hurt my husband's feelings, and was kind of telling him to get over it." I had no idea.

That's where I think, recognizing that the differences, we can lean into that and say, "That's okay." That's one of the implications of that for us, as women, especially.

Mark Timm:

Well, I love that, not just for you as women, but I'm hearing it from the male perspective as well, and I'm applying some of that same logic and taking a sigh of relief, because there are just things that my wife can do and process that I can't. It seems like no matter how much I read or want to, it sounds like we're not supposed to, which is okay. It's that permission to be different.

But I have to ask the question, this is the question that really I kind of had to put a couple questions before this so that I didn't have the tendency to dive right in, because my curiosity is piqued here to ask you. So with all this research you've done, what are the things that we most, and I say we because there's a mixed audience out there listening to this, but need to know about men? For example, you say there's a hidden undercurrent under the surface. We don't see the impacts a lot of what men do. Tell us about that, give us the big boulders that we've got to know about men.

Shaunti F:

The most important thing that we find underneath the surface, actually, is it's important to compare men and women here, because it helps us understand, for us as women, helps us understand men better, is to realize that statistically, men and women tend ... By the way, I need to say this, these are generalizations. There are always exceptions. By definition, if 75% of men said one way, 25% didn't.

Mark Timm:

Absolutely.



Shaunti F:

There's always ... Everybody's an individual. But, that said, men and women tend to have two very different sets of insecurities under the surface. Now, to some degree, we all have doubt and worry and concerns about everything. But that said, we found that no, there's some really foundational differences here. In order to understand some of the needs of men, and why guys react in a certain way when their wife say this or does this, we need to understand what's going on underneath the surface with that doubt, that worry, that insecurity.

Here's what we tell women, and men ... Jeff and I do marriage conferences. We always start of by saying, "Okay. Let's compare the two." For us as women, what we found in our surveys, and we've done our surveys from age 15 to 75, so all those ages, this tends to be the case throughout age 15 to 75. With women, our question tends to be, am I lovable? Am I special? Am I beautiful? It's kind of an, am I worthy of being loved for who I am on the inside, so we love to feel loved and cherished. That's what lights us up.

For men, it's kind of like, yeah, whatever. That's good. That's nice. But for them, on the inside, the question of a man, in most cases, is very different. It's, am I able? Am I adequate? Do I measure up? Am I any good at what I do on the outside? We have no idea as women, that that question is even there. The guys kind of described, going through their day with this feeling of, I want to tackle a challenge. I want to do great things. I want to be a great husband or a great salesmen, whatever it is they do, but I'm really not sure that I know what I'm doing, and I hope nobody finds out.

Mark Timm:

Isn't this, this is the overly simple side of this, but yet the most complicated, when I'm sure you're doing marriage conferences, but who is that one person that matters most too? The women is asking, "Am I lovable, and specifically, by you?"

Shaunti F:

Yep.

Mark Timm:

I think the woman may assume the man is measuring himself against the world, and all of his colleagues and everything, but who really matters the most, as to whether or not he measures up. That's the overly simplified, but yet most powerful aspect of this, is that, I think sometimes, we say, "Well, the world tells my wife she's lovable, so I don't need to tell her."



Shaunti F:

Yeah.

Mark Timm:

Because she's loved in this group of she's loved by these people, and so she doesn't need me to tell her. But, she can be loved by all those people, but I think if I don't tell her, then she's never measuring up. And same thing, the guy can be great at what he does, but if the women doesn't tell him that he measures up, then he's always going to be searching. That's what I hear out of it too.

Shaunti F:

You're totally right. We actually asked that on the survey. That's one of the biggest themes is that we're looking to the people around us for signals as to the answer to our main question. Am I lovable? Am I worthy of being loved for who I am on the inside? The guy is looking to people around him for signals. Am I any good at what I do? Do I measure up? Of course, the most important people in your life, are the ones that you most care about those signals and obviously the person who holds our heart in their hands the most, is going to be our spouse.

Mark Timm:

Yeah.

Shaunti F:

It's not the only person.

Mark Timm:

No.

Shaunti F:

But by far, by far the most important one. I've had so many men, so many men, say something almost verbatim, like it's really interesting how, as I just randomly talked to men, I kind of interview every guy I come across.

Mark Timm:

That was what you were doing before we got started.



Shaunti F:

Kind of, yeah. Sort of, yeah. But it's interesting, I've heard so many men say, almost verbatim, "I could be having a terrible time at work. My boss could be on my back. The kids could be disobedient. There could be all sort of things going on, but if I know my wife appreciates me, and she affirms me, I could conquer the world, no problem."

Mark Timm:

That gives me chills. That's powerful. I have to tell you, we were talking about teenagers before we got started, I'm about to send some of these guys back here off to the world. This one on the end is 19. He's about to leave the house. I got a Father's Day card from him and you wonder, after years, 19 years of pouring into his life. I just opened it. It's a routine. I got Father's Day cards every year. But, when he said, "Dad, I want to be just like you."

Shaunti F:

Gosh.

Mark Timm:

I don't cry very often, but I lost it, because deep down, I didn't realize how much I dreamed of hearing those words. He did it because he meant it, at 19 years old, and it just brought me to my knees. It literally shook me at my core, because I don't think I allowed myself to say out loud, how much I desired to hear that from him, after pouring into his life for 19 years.

Shaunti F:

That is so precious. Oh my goodness.

Mark Timm:

I can relate to how the spouse, but even your children, as they get to be older. When they're younger, they say that kind of stuff all the time, because you're they're hero, but then they go through this period where they're figuring out life and they're deciding who they want to follow, and as a father, you have this inner dream and desire for them to want to be like you.

Shaunti F:

Oh gosh. That's just beautiful. Totally. It does point out, for us as women, we hear that, and there's something that stirs in our hearts, because we put it in our own grid of wanting to feel loved and special, and



like that says, that we are worthy of being loved. There's something that has been poured in to this other person, and they have gone through their rebellious phase where they didn't like you very much, and now, they're coming back as an adult and saying, "You're worth my love. You have been such a special person, such a unique and important person in my life."

I know that that message goes to dads too, but we as women, we don't realize that a dad doesn't truly doesn't hear it that way. A dad really hears, I've done a good job. A dad is hearing, when he says, "I want to be just like you", it's I have created and poured in and accomplished something I've been trying to do, which is to send this person out into the world, wanting to be like me. There's a subtle difference there, but it's a huge difference for us as women to understand that a guy ... We hear that men are performance oriented. We've heard that phrase before. I don't think we as women really know what that means. That's what it means. A guy is always looking for signals. Did I do a good job at this?

Mark Timm:

I love that. You kind of already touched on the next question I had for you, which is, knowing that men sometimes have this secret self-doubt, what does that mean for the women? What should they do and not do?

Shaunti F:

Yeah. The most surprising, for me, and I think for a lot of women, the most high leverage, if you're going to do just one thing, change this one thing. What should it be? Because the guy is always asking that question, and you have an opportunity to answer that question, every day, multiple times a day, is to realize that his greatest need isn't to hear you say things like, "I love you." We will always, we as women, will naturally gravitate towards, "Honey, I love you." We try to do things that we hope he'll find to be loving. At the same stinking time, without realizing it, we might be criticizing him a lot. Or we might be teasing him in public.

We're out with friends and joking about this or that and what he didn't do right and telling some funny story. He's laughing. It's not funny. Or we're telling him what to do. We don't realize that when we're doing those things, we are sending a really specific signal that says, "No. You're not able. No, you don't measure up. And, oh, by the way, what you did on the outside just there, it wasn't good enough." As women, we have no idea that that's what we're doing and saying, and we certainly would never intend to send a message that a man would find hurtful and would hurt his feelings. Not that any guy is going to say, "That hurts my feelings." We have no idea that that is legitimately his most painful feeling.



The men, on the survey, I was fascinated by this. They said, if they had to make a choice, in terms of the need that they had, the emotional need that comes out of this, if they had to make a choice, they said, that they would actually give up feeling that their wife loved them if they could just feel that she respected them, appreciated him, believed in him, trusted him. And all of those things, feeling my wife believes in me and trusts me and appreciates me, far more important to the average man than feeling that his wife loves him.

Mark Timm:

I have to tell you, I'm sitting here thinking to myself, and my own situation. I'm the only man you're talking to right now, so there's a lot of men that are going to be listening to this, but when you're talking about that, I would much rather my wife say to me, "Mark, I trust you to make this decision." To me, you know what that says? I love you.

Shaunti F:

Exactly.

Mark Timm:

I would rather my wife say, "Thank you for taking care of this for our family." Because what that says to me, is you love me. But saying you love me, doesn't say you appreciate me, doesn't say thank you, you trust me. Doesn't say any of that stuff, but saying you appreciate me, saying thank you, saying I trust you, I respect you, every one of those says I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, to me. I know that's counterintuitive, but I know how I feel when she says, "I trust you to make this decision. I appreciate how you handled that." I just hear, I love you, I love you, I love you. But when she says, "I love you." I'm like, "For what?"

Shaunti F:

Yeah. Thanks.

Mark Timm:

Why? I don't get that that was random.

Shaunti F:

Yes. Exactly.



Mark Timm:

Anyway.

Shaunti F:

You know, what's actually interesting is we ... Okay, this is embarrassing to admit, but I'm going to admit it anyway. Hearing that my husband's greatest need was, once I finally figured this out, was to know that I respect him and I appreciate him, I'm thinking, okay, well, what can I say, right? Because he can say, "I love you", to me, and it fills me up. It says all these different things, emotionally, because that's my question. Am I lovable? Right?

So, I'm thinking, oh, well, okay. If a guy's greatest need is to feel that I respect him, "Oh, honey. I respect you so much." I would just go and say, "I really respect you." Finally, my poor husband, he kind of had to go, "Um, timeout. I know what you're trying to do, and I appreciate it, but it doesn't have the same ring to it." I went on this quest for, really, it took like five years, six years, it took a long time, to figure out, what can we, as women, say, that has the same emotional impact on a man, that I love you does on us, as women. And understanding, like we said, these are generalizations. There's always exceptions. But what is that little phrase, and we finally identified it.

Mark Timm:

All right. Lay it on us. What is it?

Shaunti F:

Believe it or not, it's, "Thank you."

Mark Timm:

Wow. Wow.

Shaunti F:

When a woman notices, and it's thank you for the little things of life, like the day to day, multiple times of day. Thanks for noticing that the light bulbs were out and changing them. Thanks for putting the dishes in the dishwasher. Thanks for, I know you were so tired and you took the kids out and you played ball in the yard anyway. You're such a good dad. Thank you. That, for a guy, that's what says those three or four things that just [crosstalk 00:26:35] them up.



Mark Timm:

You're right.

Shaunti F:

I noticed what you did and it was good and I appreciate it. It says like four different things.

Mark Timm:

Is this ... One of the questions that I had for you is, and I think you may have just answered it, is when we feel less than loved in a relationship, because maybe we're in a conflict, I know that my wife needs a hug. That's what she needs. She needs hug. But when it's on the other foot, the husband disappears because he doesn't need a hug. He checks out. That's not what he needs. Why does this happen and what can we do about it? Is that related to what we're talking about here?

Shaunti F:

Well, actually, okay. It's a slightly different thing. It's similar but it's different. One of the things that we found in the study of men is that men and women process these kinds of situations differently. Let's just say there is an emotional conflict happening. You're arguing about something, tensions are high, and we as women, we're feeling at that point, and this is what we, by the way, we tell the men, is that because what's happening with that argument, it's triggering that question of, am I lovable? Does he still love me? Is he glad he married me right now? That leads to this insecure feeling of, are we okay?

So, we as women usually are moving toward the guy, wanting to resolve this.

Mark Timm:

That's where the hug comes in.

Shaunti F:

That's where the hug comes in. Exactly.

Mark Timm:

Okay. I'm still okay. I'm still lovable.

Shaunti F:

Exactly. It's almost like, we want to process that out loud. For a guy, in most cases, not all, men's brains



are actually wired the opposite, where for a man, it's actively difficult for him to be processing in that situation because the emotions are running high. He just wants to escape. When he says, "I just can't talk. I need space." There's actually a physiological reason behind that, which is women tend to process verbally. Our brains are wired that we think things through by talking them through. I know that's a huge surprise to everybody listening. That tends to be the case.

Men's brains are wired exactly the opposite, where it's very difficult, especially when emotions are involved. It is very difficult to think things through while talking them through. Men need to remove themselves. They need to go underground. They need to get some space and go, what am I even thinking? There tends to be, the differences cause even more problems than what you were originally arguing about, because I, as a woman, and many other women statistically, tend to be following our man around the house, going, "Well, what are you thinking about what I just said? Don't walk away from me. What are you feeling?" The guy's thinking, "I don't know what I'm feeling."

Mark Timm:

But I need some space.

Shaunti F:

Yeah. For us, as women, we're like, how can you not know what you're feeling? That's just the difference in brain wiring. So, when he pulls away, to get that space, suddenly, that's even worse of a feeling for us, because now it's like, oh my gosh. He doesn't care. Now that worried feeling's even higher on our part. Instead, if we can see that as this is actually him needing to get some space so that he can respond in a way that's actually going to be better for us in the end, and let him have that space, and to say, "I'm worried right now. I'm insecure, but maybe we should be talking about this in the morning." A lot of guys said, "Late at night, nothing good is going to come if we insist on trying to have this conversation. Let's come back together in the morning." He'll be much better able to talk about it, because his brain has had a chance to process.

We just don't realize as women how often our insistence on trying to process something when we're upset is actually, potentially, could make things worse.

Mark Timm:

Very, very, very insightful. I'm going to take you down another path that I think our listeners and community members really want some insight on. It's so important to every relationship and that is, in your book,



you say we have a misunderstanding about what physical intimacy means to our husband.

Shaunti F:

Yeah. I was wondering if that was where you were going with this.

Mark Timm:

Yeah. I have to go there, Shaunti. I have to go there, because this is an area that really can make or really cause a lot of pain points in relationships.

Shaunti F:

Oh, yeah. It does.

Mark Timm:

I feel like we wouldn't be doing a service to the community if we didn't go there and unpack that a little bit. What do you mean by that?

Shaunti F:

It turns out that each, both men and women, have a big misunderstanding, and sense right now, we're really just covering women understanding men's side of this. Let's just talk about that. By the way, I should be saying, from the very beginning, all this stuff, when we're talking one sided, there's always another side, right? That's when we talk directly to the men and explain women to them. I don't want women listening to this to hear, this is all on you, because obviously we have both sides.

But, we can only do what we can do, and understand the other person, helping women understand this is huge for a guy and huge for marriage, usually. Even though there's some marriages that are switched on this, where the couples have different expectations, this is at least 75% of couples.

What we found, as women, we tend to misunderstand what physical intimacy means to our husband. We think a physical intimacy, in our marriages, as being primarily a physical need. That's the category that we've put it in. We sort of say, it's a physical need. It's a physical urge. You think, I am sorry, I've been running around after kids all day, and sleep is a physical need, right? Instead, as I was talking to the men and asking them, "What's the importance of this in your life?" What I heard had nothing to do with the physical.



Mark Timm:

Wow.

Shaunti F:

What I heard from these men, was entirely this enormous emotional need, that they couldn't get met any other way, by the way. It's the need that every man has to feel that his wife desires him.

Mark Timm:

Wow.

Shaunti F:

And that she wants him. Here's the thing that we as women don't get. If a man feels that his wife desires him, and she sends those signals, it gives a man a sense of confidence. It gives him a sense of well being, it turns out, in every other area of his life. Not just in the bedroom. If he doesn't feel desired, and he gets those signals, it almost gives him a sense of a lack of well being and a lack of confidence in all the other areas of his life.

What you're hearing there, that's not primarily a physical need.

Mark Timm:

Not at all.

Shaunti F:

That's a huge emotional need. We women don't get it, because to us, it looks like a physical need and instead it's this ... I love one comment that a man made on the survey, he said, "I don't think my wife realizes that what happens the night before in the bedroom, it absolutely impacts how I feel about myself the next day at the office."

Mark Timm:

Wow.

Shaunti F:

I think we women absolutely don't get that. Again, there's some exceptions to this. There's plenty of couples that are flipped, but in terms of the majority, this is something where once we see it as this



huge emotional need, this is one of those things that makes a man feel loved. That changes the equation.

Mark Timm:

I love that. Again, as the man you're talking to here, I agree with it. Even with six teenagers at home, it gets very difficult to find quiet time. Even a glance in the kitchen when we're getting things ready for the dinner, even a brush that's intentionally closer than it needed to be, can help a man feel like they are desired. Even if the man knows that the chances of more happening are maybe impossible due to circumstances, the signals are sent.

Shaunti F:

Yeah.

Mark Timm:

I know that. I felt that. It doesn't always have to be just in the bedroom. The woman can send the man the signals he needs outside of the bedroom, as well.

Shaunti F:

Absolutely.

Mark Timm:

And it's meaningful. I stand a little taller and feel a little more adequate as a man when I know that my wife desires me, even if I know circumstantially, nothing more can happen than that. But it's powerful. I appreciate you being so candid in that regard.

Shaunti F:

The thing I think we women still, we said at the beginning of this conversation, that so many men have this self-doubt, this deep vulnerability under the surface. We don't know it's there, but it's there. The men on the survey were basically saying, this one thing, if they're in this category, which like we said, not all men are, but if they're in this category, where this is an emotional need. This is that priority in their life. If they're in that category, there's almost no better way to soothe that insecurity and that self-doubt, than for the wife to be signaling, I desire you. That literally can be, as simple as like you were talking about, flirting in the kitchen. But, when the kids aren't looking and you raise your eyebrows or something, because of course, if the kids are looking, they'll go, "Oh gross, mom."



Mark Timm:

You know, what's so funny is that we get caught, often times in the kitchen, and our daughter, Sylvia, "I know what you're doing. I know what you're doing." I think, deep down, it reassures them as well.

Shaunti F:

I'm sure it does, even though, think about the way we were with our parents. We were like, oh, no. I don't want to be thinking about that. But doing that, or even if it's those little things, or when you do go to bed, this is a big deal that I don't think us as women realize, is that if we make the first move once in a while, that's huge for a guy.

Mark Timm:

I agree. It's huge.

Shaunti F:

It sends that signal. Don't flirt too much in the kitchen without actually doing that every now and then.

Mark Timm:

Have some follow through.

Shaunti F:

There has to be some follow up at some point.

Mark Timm:

All right. Let's switch just a minute and tackle, because that was so powerful and so real, and think can help so many people. Let's flip to something that can sometimes be hurtful, and that is, we know that men are visual and maybe some of the women listening to this have had to confront a concern about whether their man is looking at another women or potentially even looking at inappropriate things on-line. What did your research tell you about this and what'd you find is going on in this area?

Shaunti F:

It turns out, even though this is awkward to talk about, I realized I had to include this, even though it keeps getting me in trouble because it's easy to misunderstand. But, I also realize, there is no other issue, no other single issue, that affects so many millions, and millions of men, and boys by the way, if you have sons, that affects so many millions of men and boys, every day, that so many millions and millions



of women are completely blind to. If we love our men and our sons, it's really important for us to know what life is like for them, whether we like it or not. It's important to understand.

I went from being really offended by this topic, once I realized what I was hearing. I went from being really kind of defensive and angry about it, and suddenly realizing, wait a minute. If this is impacting my husband, and I have a teenage son, this is impacting my husband and my son, I want to know. I want to know what they're facing every day, because there's no way I can help support them in today's culture if I don't understand it.

Here's basically the framework. It turns out that the male and female brain are actually wired differently when it comes to processing visual inputs, which is why we women don't get this, at all. Turns out our brains literally don't process things the same way men's brains do.

There is a stimulation that happens in the center of the brain called nucleus accumbens. It's kind of towards the back of the brain, where the automatic stuff happens.

Mark Timm:

Yep. Fight and flight. Eat.

Shaunti F:

Exactly. Digestion. You don't think about digesting your food. The nucleus accumbens is in the midbrain, getting back towards the back of the brain, where a lot of that happens, and it's the center of the brain that, as a way of explaining this to women, it's the same center of the brain that's actually stimulated when, if you're really hungry, and you haven't eaten all day, and you walk into room and you see food across the room. It's this automatic gut level, I want to consume that. You're drawn to that. You're not thinking about it at the very beginning. It's this, uh, I want that. That's your nucleus accumbens lighting up.

Then, the very next second, your cortical centers, the thinking centers of the front of the brain light up, and that's where you look and you go, wait, has dinner started yet? Can I go over there and eat or what choice do I make? But that first feeling is a very biological automatic feeling. You can't really control that. It's a choice of what you do then.

That's exactly what it's like for a guy, apparently. I've never experienced this, because I've got a female brain. But, for a guy, apparently, in this culture, whenever he sees those images of a woman dressed to show off a great figure, whether it's the woman walking across the parking lot wearing not much, or



whether it's that commercial that's up on the TV screen, the nucleus accumbens in the male brain lights up, and he's automatically drawn. I want to consume that image. I want to look at that. It's not really, the way the men described it, it's not really exactly a desire for the person, it's a desire for the image, because it feels good to the brain to look at that. Then the very next second, the cortical centers kick in. He thinks to himself, oh wait, don't look there. Don't look at the television screen or turn my head away from the woman in the parking lot. That's where the choice happens.

But we women don't realize that there's a little intrabrain war happening, because we don't experience it. When we see an attractive man, our nucleus accumbens stays dark, which our husbands are usually very sad to hear. Even with them. Our thinking centers are what light up from the beginning. We think to ourselves, he's an attractive man and that's about it. We don't realize that men have this war in their brain because, just wrapping it up, every day, in this culture, they are seeing and their brains are being stimulated in public, by sights that were only supposed to be seen in private.

Mark Timm:

Wow. You're right.

Shaunti F:

If you think about it, the way that all of us were created in all sorts of different ways, if you think about it, back in the day, the only sight a man would ever see in this way, ever, was of his wife, on their wedding night. And then it's a great thing, because guys love this when they're alone with their wives. They don't want to turn it off then, but they kind of wish they could turn it off everywhere else.

Mark Timm:

Yeah.

Shaunti F:

That's, what we as women, need to recognize, because this can be hurtful and we have to take it off of the way that it would be hurtful for us, because if we're thinking about a man in that kind of sexual, sensual way, we're doing it on purpose. But a guy, that initial temptation, that is not his choice. What he then chooses to do with it, is his choice.

Mark Timm:

Yeah. Totally. But isn't that powerful, when you understand these concepts, it's not that they're simple,



but when you explain them in the way that you did, it's like okay. When you understand that it's instinctual, then you can actually have a conversation with your guy about it, or your sons about it. Hey, I actually know what's going on. So instead of shaming them, okay, because that's a lot of what happens is, is the guy feels shamed if you bring this up, because he's done something wrong. The initial reaction was not wrong, it's what happens next that becomes wrong.

If the initial reaction cannot be this yucky thing and a shameful thing, then the guy can actually have a real conversation about it. I think that may be key and I'm going to use this by the way with my boys, because it allows you to have really good dialogue about it, without it feeling so shameful. I think that's why it becomes such a problem is because it's a very shaming behavior.

Shaunti F:

Let's hide it.

Mark Timm:

When the initial behavior, there's nothing to be ashamed of, it's what happens next that really matters. But if we can get through that first part, then we can have a good conversation about the next part.

Shaunti F:

One of the things that I think us as women, when we're talking with men about this ... What I hear from guys often is, they themselves don't even recognize this, right? Like my husband says, "Look. Guys don't generally talk about this kind of stuff with other guys." You'll talk about intimate stuff with your wife and that's about it. Guys feel very alone from what I've heard. Jeff says, "It's not like men sit around at Starbucks, going, you got images?" "Yeah, I got images." They don't sit around and have those conversations. As a result, men themselves don't even understand this enough to be able to talk about it, until they hear this, and then it's not just the wife being able to have a conversation with the husband, it's the husband understanding it enough to have that conversation without feeling defensive.

Mark Timm:

I love it.

Shaunti F:

Here's the other thing that is really important for women to hear, because there are many women listening to this, where their husband probably has gotten into some issues, because, let's just be honest. This



culture is constantly stimulating the male brain, constantly, constantly, in a way that he does not want, but it's happening anyway. It shouldn't be a surprise that for some men, they've gotten kind of weary of that struggle. Men tend to go through phases. Sometimes they're more vulnerable than others. Most men absolutely adore their wives and they do not want to hurt them. They do not want to hurt their feelings. But they don't feel like she's going to understand it, so they keep it kind of close to the vest. Okay. This is awkward. I don't really want to talk to you about this. If a woman can show, look, you're right. I don't understand this, but I want to. I want to do this so I can be here for you, rather than, "Are you looking at other women? What are you saying?"

Guys, they love their wives. The last thing they want to do is hurt them, so a lot of men close this off when what they most need if they've gotten themselves into trouble, what they most need is to be able to open up. If it's gone in a particularly bad direction, to be able to open up enough to get some help and support from other men.

One of the things that counselors always tell me, is that a wife can never be the police. That is incredibly destructive for a marriage. But if he can get into a guy's group, where they address this and they hold each other accountable and provide support, that's the kind of stuff, many men actually would like to do, but don't know how to bring it up with their wife, because she'll freak out.

Mark Timm:

Wow. This is powerful. We could probably do a whole show on this because it is permeating our society, our boys, our men. It is. I've been told by mentors and people I care greatly about, it's the second look that is the problem. The first look is instinctive, and now I understand why.

Shaunti F:

It's the head on the swivel. Now you know why.

Mark Timm:

That's instinctive. It's the second look that was intentional. The first look was not intentional. It was instinctive. It happened before you even had the ability to decide to look or not look. But it's the second look that starts to cross over.

Shaunti F:

The way that some men described it to me, which I thought was, again, not being a guy, I don't know



exactly, but it sounds right to me, is to say, to help a women get this, is imagine that someone holds up a sign in front of you. They just go like this. A sign with three words and the three words are, don't read this. Your brain reads it, whether you want your brain to read it or not.

Mark Timm:

Yep.

Shaunti F:

You can't help reading it. That's the way, that really, truly, the male brain is truly wired. He's going to read, great body, whether he wants to or not. But then most men, this is where they love their wives, they care, they've trained themselves to go, oh, don't. No. Think about baseball. Think about my wife. Pull that thought out of my head. That's what boys have to learn. That's the process, because they're growing up in this culture whether we want them to or not. It's heart breaking for me, as the mom of a 14 year old son.

Mark Timm:

Yep. Yep.

Shaunti F:

Because he is being confronted with this every day, and I want to help him, not make him feel awful and like a pervert. He needs to know.

Mark Timm:

The thing I want to say to the Thrive community here is, is that, the biggest mistake we can make is to pretend it's not happening.

Shaunti F:

Yeah.

Mark Timm:

We can't do that. We have to know that it is happening and hit it head on. We're running out of time, so I'm going to throw you a couple big picture questions, okay?



Shaunti F:

Okay.

Mark Timm:

We're just going to lead with some big stuff and that is, in all your research, what was your greatest surprise about men?

Shaunti F:

Wow. Okay, that's a really good one. I think it has to be what we found at the end of the survey. This still makes me emotional every time I talk about it. At the very end of the survey, we gave the men a blank space and asked, I think the actual question is, what's the one most important thing you wish your wife or your girlfriend knew that you can't explain to her or tell her?

We had done all these multiple choice questions, so this was a chance that they could say anything. It was a blank space. I thought, it would be a chance for the men to kind of vent or say, "I want more sex", or whatever it is. I was going to categorize the answers and rank them. When I got the survey responses back, I almost started crying, because the top answer by far, when they could say anything, the one most important thing I wish my wife knew is how much I love her.

Mark Timm:

Wow.

Shaunti F:

It just pointed out to me that our men have so much of this bottled up inside and they don't necessarily feel like they're able to express that in a way that their wife will believe. But that's how they feel about the woman in their life. This is a huge deal, when a guy says, "I just want to make my wife happy." He means it, because he adores his wife. So for us as women, it's a huge encouragement to say, that's a lot of goodwill from our men and it's a chance for us to have some goodwill back and learn some of these things. Practice some of these things that we just didn't know mattered before.

Mark Timm:

Wow. That's powerful. I think, as a man, when I hear my wife says, when I hear her say, "Thank you. I appreciate you.", it's almost like, there's my window to be able to pour back in. It shouldn't be an either or. Men should be empowered to do it either way, but that's powerful. We didn't get to talk much about



understanding women, okay, from the men's perspective, and we're really out of time, but I want to just borrow a little extra time, and let you speak generically, and maybe answer that question of, what were some of the big rocks that you uncovered when you were doing the research for understanding women? Just give you a chance to talk generically about greatest surprises or biggest takeaways in that regard.

Shaunti F:

Yeah. The most important thing for men to know, just sort of capping off this conversation, is that, you know how you most wish that your wife knows that you love her, right? For so many women, men don't realize that that's the thing she doubts the most.

Mark Timm:

Wow.

Shaunti F:

It's not anything that you're necessarily doing wrong, it's that question and insecurity in her heart. Remember, you've got yours as a guy. Am I any good at what I do? That I do the dishes well. Am I a good dad? Those kinds of things. For her, it's not about what she does, the question, am I lovable, as a human being, is very deep. A lot of men misunderstand this because when you guys get married, and you see her walk down the aisle and you say your I dos, you're kind of like, okay, good. On to the next thing. That question is settled. She knows I love her.

You need to understand the same way that that question, do I measure up? It didn't go away just because you got married.

Mark Timm:

Right.

Shaunti F:

The question in her heart, am I lovable, that doesn't go away just because you're married. Instead, it morphs a little bit to, does he still love me? Is he glad he married me? Would he choose me all over again? So she has that question every day. She needs to know the answer to that every day. So that's where, if that is how you feel about your wife, how much I wish she knew that I love her, then it's literally the littlest things every day that will tell her that. Just make sure to signal that every day. As little as reaching across and taking her hand when you're walking across the parking lot. That says it. "I'm so glad I married you." That's what that says.



Mark Timm:

We so over complicate this, Shaunti. We so over complicate this.

Shaunti F:

It's just an encouragement to the guys to know, this is how you feel about her, just make sure she knows that's how you feel about her, every day.

Mark Timm:

All right. Here's the scoop. Before we even started, you were holding up this book and that book, and this book and that book. I don't think people realize you've sold two million copies of books. You've got a lot more books than what we just talked about here today. We so appreciate you joining us as our Thrive Family Focus expert. What would be the best way for our community, for the Zislar Family Community, to find out more about you, your books, your speaking schedule, and so on?

Shaunti F:

The easiest place is to go to shaunti.com, which is S-H-A-U-N-T-I.com. I always have to spell that, as you can imagine.

Mark Timm:

That's fair. That's good. I'm glad you did.

Shaunti F:

You can see, not just the books, but you can actually see the research as well. We have all the surveys up there on the website and the speaking schedule and everything else.

Mark Timm:

Well, on video, I'm going to tell you right now, that there is, you're a wealth of information. There's so much more that we could be talking about and so, we have an expanded community with Zislar Family as well, so I can say this to the community with confidence. This is not the last time you're going to hear from Shaunti. We'd love to have her share her wisdom in other areas as well. Look for, enjoy this, but I'm sure that Shaunti is going to become a go to resource for our community.

Thanks so much for joining us, with this month's Thrive Family Focus expert, Shaunti Feldhahn. It was so helpful hearing her insights on the different aspects of marriages, relationship, men, women.



Now, to make the most of what you learned today, I challenge you to think about what small changes you can make in your approach to interacting with your spouse. As Shaunti said, it can be a touch of a hand. It can be a hug. It can be words of affirmation. Is there something that Shaunti said that really struck a chord with you? Something that make you think, yes, that sounds like me. That sounds like my situation. I think I can do something about this. I encourage you to take some of the suggestions that Shaunti mentioned and really make an effort to implement some small change today, that will empower your marriage, your friendships and ultimately your family to move forward on your journey toward significance. You can do it. In fact, I'd love for you to share your experience with all of us in the Thrive Facebook group, so that we can all be inspired by your success.

Thanks again for joining us today, and we'll see you again soon.